The New Criterion

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

T. J. Clark and the Marxist critique of modern painting *by Hilton Kramer,* 1

Summer in Obolenskoye *by Alexander Pasternak,* 9

American literary radicalism in the Twenties *by James W. Tuttleton,* 16

The Motherwell retrospective *by Roger Kimball,* 31

New poems *by James Ulmer, Luke Zilles, and Leslie Norris,* 41

Theater: Kundera and his master *by Mimi Kramer,* 46; **Art:** The real Robert Morris? *by Eric Gibson,* 55; **Photography:** Photography and architecture: notes on a conference *by Gail Buckland,* 57

Books: *Robert Phillips, editor* Letters of Delmore Schwartz & *Mary Jarrell, editor* Randall Jarrell's letters *reviewed by Bruce Bawer,* 65; *Olof Lagercrantz* August Strindberg *reviewed by Vernon Young,* 71;

Notebook: Performance pieces *by Mimi Kramer,* 80; **Letters,** 89

Volume 3, Number 7 *March* 1985

$3.50

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Alex Katz

CUTOUTS

Lee Krasner

CHARCOAL DRAWINGS 1938-1940

ROBERT MILLER 724 FIFTH AVENUE

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dorothea Rockburne

Painting and Drawing

February 23—March 30

Joan Mitchell

New Paintings

April 3—May 4

XAVIER FOURCADE INC.

36 East 75th Street New York, New York 10021 212 535-3980

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dellas, 1984. Acrylic on canvas, 6 ft. 2 in. x 6 ft. 2 in. (188 x 188 cm)

Lawrence Poons

New Paintings · February 28 to March 23

André Emmerich Gallery, Inc.

41 East 57th Street, New York 10022 · Telephone (212) 752-0124

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The New Criterion *March 1985*

Editor *Hilton Kramer*

Publisher *Samuel Lipman*

Managing Editor *Erich Eichman*

Assistant Managing Editor *Eva Szent-Miklosy*

Poetry Editor *Robert Richman*

Office Manager *Colleen Babington*

Contributors to this issue

Bruce Bawer contributed "The Phenomenon of Allen Ginsberg" to the February issue of *The New Criterion.*

Gail Buckland teaches the history of photography at Cooper Union. She is the curator for the exhibition "Visions of Liberty," featuring photographs of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, which is currently on view at the New York Historical Society.

Eric Gibson reviews current exhibitions for *The New Criterion.*

Roger Kimball reviewed *Home Before Dark,* Susan Cheever's memoir of her father, in the February issue of *The New Criterion.*

Mimi Kramer is the regular theater critic for *The New Criterion.*

Leslie Norris has published nine books of verse and one of short stories. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

James W. Tuttleton teaches American literature at New York University.

James Ulmer's poems have appeared in *Poetry, The New Yorker,* and the *Virginia Quarterly Review.*

Vernon Young is the author of *Cinema Borealis: Ingmar Bergman and the Swedish Ethos.* He reviewed Zdzislaw Najder's *Joseph Conrad: A Chronicle* in the June 1984 issue of *The New Criterion.*

Luke Zilles is a poet who lives in Delhi, New York.

The New Criterion is published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. Publication Number ISSN 0734-0222. March 1985, Volume 3, Number 7. Subscription rates: $27 for one year, $50 for two. Second-class postage paid at New York, NY and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: send changes of address to 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019.

Copyright © 1985 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc.

Distributed in England by Periodicals in Particular, 1 Prince of Wales Passage, 117 Hampstead Road, London, NW1. Editorial/business correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt of an issue must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of its date.
Advertising representative: Kate Shanley, 521 Fifth Ave., NY 10175. (718) 729-6221.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman and printed by the Eastern Press of New Haven, Connecticut.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marsden Hartley

A Major Exhibition of
Paintings and Drawings

Fully illustrated catalogue available.

March 6 to April 27

Salander-O'Reilly Galleries, Inc.

22 East 80 Street New York, NY 10021

Telephone (212) 879-6606

Gallery hours: Monday-Saturday, 10 to 5:30

Gail Levin in conjunction with
Salander-O'Reilly Galleries
announces the preparation of
Marsden Hartley:
A Catalogue Raisonné

Christ Figure, circa 1941-43.
Oil on masonite, 30 x 8 inches

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

T. J. Clark and the Marxist critique of modern painting

by Hilton Kramer

The question is, finally: how could there be an effective political art? Is not the whole thing a chimaera, a dream, incompatible with the basic conditions of artistic production in the nineteenth century—easel painting, privacy, isolation, the art market, the ideology of individualism? Could there be any such thing as revolutionary art until the means existed—briefly, abortively—to change those basic conditions: till 1919, when El Lissitzky puts up his propaganda poster outside a factory in Vitebsk; or 1918, in Berlin, when Richard Huelsenbeck has the opportunity, at last, to "make poetry with a gun in his hand"?

—T. J. Clark, in *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851.*

"It turns out we are part of the superstructure," M. said to me in 1922, after our return from Georgia. Not long before, M. had written about the separation of culture from the State, but the Civil War had ended, and the young builders of the new State had begun—for the time being in theory only—to put everything in its proper place. It was then that culture was assigned to the superstructure.

—Nadezhda Mandelstam, in *Hope Against Hope: A Memoir.*

There are times when, owing to its larger ramifications, a single academic appointment at a leading university very quickly acquires the status of an historical event for those alert to its meaning. The appointment of T. J. Clark as professor of art history at Harvard University in 1980 was for some observers an event of this kind. For what it signified was a decisive shift in the way the study of art history—and most particularly, of course, the history of modern painting, which is Professor Clark's academic specialty—would henceforth be pursued as an intellectual discipline at this venerable seat of learning.

In an earlier generation the Harvard art history department, together with its illustrious museum-training program at the Fogg Art Museum, had won a high reputation among the *cognoscenti* of the art world as a citadel of humanistic scholarship and aesthetic connoisseurship. There had indeed developed a distinctive Fogg tradition at Harvard. It was a tradition based, above all, on the close, comparative study of individual art objects, and one of its goals was to produce a certain kind of expert intelligence—aesthetic intelligence. In the perspective of this tradition, it was assumed that for the mastery of such intelligence the cultivation of sensibility—a sensibility for objects—was quite as essential as the acquisition of historical knowledge; that, in other words, aesthetic intelligence was virtually meaningless if separated from the disciplines of connoisseurship.

This, in any event, appears to have been the ideal that once governed the Fogg tra-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

dition at Harvard, and from the influence it exerted on the museums and the universities, on art collecting and on art scholarship, there can be no question but that the art public in America had over the course of many years reaped some significant benefits. There are certainly more than a few masterpieces to be seen in our public collections today which owe their presence there—and thus their place in our experience—directly or indirectly to precisely the kind of connoisseurship that concentrates its principal interest on aesthetic quality. For this reason, the Fogg tradition may be accurately described, I think, as an example of cultural elitism that serves the public interest.

If there was also something to be said against the Fogg tradition—that it tended to be snobbish and clubby; that it was often condescending to outsiders, operating in the world of money, jobs, appointments, and preferments, as something of an old-boy network; and that it produced its full share of duffers who had all the appurtenances and pretensions of the connoisseur without any discernible trace of the sensibility or knowledge essential to the connoisseur's task—well, that too may be taken as a measure of how far the ideal often fell short of being realized in an imperfect world. The ideal itself, however, was not only a noble one, but one that had the merit of addressing itself to something at once central and indispensable to our aesthetic experience.

By the time Professor Clark came to Harvard in 1980, this Fogg tradition was already on the wane. If its demise was not quite complete, its days were nonetheless clearly numbered. The cultural insurgency of the Sixties had done its work at Harvard, no less than elsewhere in the academic world, and a new administration at the university was obviously prepared to welcome not only radical change but a change in the direction of an avowedly left-wing radicalism. Art history was by no means the only field in which this new direction made itself felt at Harvard. Its successful penetration of the law-school faculty was sufficiently dramatic in its consequences to cause articles to be written about them in *The New Yorker, The New York Times,* and other publications. For those who understood what was happening to the study of art history at Harvard, the change represented by Professor Clark's appointment was seen straightaway to be no less fateful.

What this change entailed, moreover, could never have been in doubt. Harvard certainly knew what it was getting. Professor Clark, a British scholar trained at Cambridge University and the Courtauld Institute, had in 1973 published two works—*The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851* and *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution*—which spelled out his philosophy of art history in unmistakable terms. They had instantly established him as one of the most programmatic and plainspoken Marxist writers then concentrating on the field of nineteenth-century French art. The author of *The Absolute Bourgeois* and *Image of the People* was not one of your new-style, hermetic Marxists, given to employing an esoteric jargon and an impenetrable syntax. There was nothing arcane in Professor Clark's vocabulary, and nothing obscure or ambiguous in his ideology. The opening chapter of *Image of the People* had been devoted to a disquisition "On the Social History of Art," which made the flagrantly political character of the inquiry altogether explicit; and lest there remain any lingering doubts on this score, Professor Clark wrote a new preface for inclusion in both volumes when these were reissued in paperback editions by the Princeton University Press in 1982.

In this preface he underscored the fact that both *Image of the People* and *The Absolute Bourgeois* "were written for the most part in the winter of 1969-70, in what seemed then (and still seems) ignominious but unavoidable retreat from the political events of the previous six years. Those events haunt the books' best and worst pages, and provide throughout the main frame of reference for the history of a distant revolution and its cultural dimension." The main purpose of the preface was thus to provide a summary

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of what Professor Clark called "the books' chief problem"—which is to say, their principal political objective.

> So I owe it to the reader, confronting these relics of a slightly better time, [he wrote] to state again what I took to be the books' chief problem. They wished to establish what happened to art when it became involved, however tangentially, in a process of revolution and counter-revolution: in other words, when it lost its normal place in the machinery of social control and was obliged for a while to seek out other spaces for representation—other publics, other subjects, other idioms, other means of production. As my Jamesian title [*The Absolute Bourgeois*] was meant to imply, one could hardly have expected the story, in an order already irredeemably capitalist, to be other than one of failure to find such space. Bourgeois society is efficient at making all art its own. The conditions for a rendezvous between artistic practice and the only class which henceforth could produce and sustain alternative meanings to those of capital did not exist in 1850, and have only existed in botched and fragmentary form in the century since—against the grain of the Bolshevik Revolution, around the edges of the Workers' Councils in Berlin, Barcelona or Turin, and nowadays [1981] perhaps in the struggle of the Polish working class to reimpose soviet rule.

There is much that could be said about the outlook that is revealed in these observations. One notes, for example, the easy, unargued assumption that the primary "meanings" to be gleaned in a work of art are those which derive from the economic and political situation in which it is produced. Then, too, there is the implacable hatred of capitalism and its corollary detestation of the institutions of bourgeois society (except, perhaps, where appointments to the Harvard University faculty are concerned). There is the inevitable—for a Marxist—glorification of revolution, and the cynical—indeed sickening—reference to "the struggle of the Polish working class to reimpose soviet rule." From these and other attitudes so emphatically avowed in the preface to the new editions of *Image of the People* and *The Absolute Bourgeois,* as well as in the books themselves, it will be evident that Professor Clark not only approaches the study of art history from the perspective of a doctrinaire Marxist, with everything this implies about the primacy given to politics in his entire intellectual enterprise, but that he wishes to be clearly understood to be doing just that. Somewhat less evident, perhaps, at least to the uninitiated, is what follows from this: that in the perspective of this politicized history of art, art itself is definitively consigned to what in classic Marxist parlance is called the "superstructure"—a subject to which we shall return in due course.

Now Professor Clark has given us a new book, his first since joining the Harvard faculty. It is called *The Painting of Modern Life,* and it bears the subtitle, "Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers."[1] Once again, the ostensible subject is nineteenth-century French painting. The names of Manet, Monet, Pissarro, Degas, Seurat, and other artists of the Impressionist era appear frequently, and reproductions of their works, both in color and in black and white, adorn its pages. Yet it will come as no surprise to any reader acquainted with *Image of the People* and *The Absolute Bourgeois* to discover that the real focus of *The Painting of Modern Life* is not on the history of *art.* What interests Professor Clark is something else.

In this new book it is mainly, but not exclusively, the issue of *class.* In its fundamental concerns, *The Painting of Modern Life* is yet another contribution to the propagation of that mythic phenomenon which lies at the heart of the Marxist conception of history: class conflict. This is Professor Clark's real subject in this book. Everything else—certainly everything involving aesthetics—is placed in a subordinate relation to that sub-

---

1 *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers;* by T. J. Clark. Alfred A. Knopf, 338 pages, $25.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ject. And while Professor Clark is shrewd enough not to insist on the fact that this is his principal subject in this book, he doesn't deny that it is, either. He even offers us some ruminations on the concept of class at the outset of the discussion, but at the same time cautioning the reader that these may appear to be "very general, not to say banal, propositions on the nature of society as such." He is anything but a fool. He knows exactly what he is doing. But he is also somewhat fearful—as he has every reason to be—of being seen to be an exponent of what he himself dismisses as "the worst pitfalls of vulgar Marxism." Rather than dwell on the "vulgar" concept of class conflict, then, he avails himself of the more sanitized and eminently more fashionable nomenclature of semiotics. Thus the new revised standard version is: "Society is a battlefield of representations." Behind this semiotic smokescreen, however, the same old Marxist scenarios remain firmly in place. Nothing has changed but the words.

The truth is, there are no instruments fine enough to measure the difference between the vulgar Marxism which Professor Clark professes to scorn and the particular variety of Marxist dialectics which governs every page of *The Painting of Modern Life*. In the one variety of Marxism, as in the other, neither the creation nor the experience of art is believed to enjoy the slightest degree of aesthetic independence from the iron laws of history. Everything in art is seen to be determined by the economic "base" and what are now called its "representations." As a result, art is simply—and sometimes very simply indeed—treated as a kind of epiphenomenon of the historical process, of interest mainly as a reflection of the depredations of bourgeois society and the strategies which have been devised to conceal or compensate for their outrageous moral consequences.

In keeping with this view, Professor Clark writes of Seurat's *La Grande Jatte* that "it attempts to find form for the appearance of class in capitalist society" and "that the forms it discovers are in some sense more truthful than most others produced at the time; and that it suggests ways in which class might still be painted." (There is thus an assumption here that "ways in which class might still be painted" is, or ought to be, an important item on the agenda of contemporary art today.) And just as "the intermingling of classes" is said to be "Seurat's subject," and hence the basis of his appeal for us, the real interest of Manet's *Olympia* is said to be "that class was the essence of Olympia's modernity and lay behind the great scandal she provoked." Of Manet's *La Musique aux Tuileries,* moreover, Professor Clark writes that it is "hardly a picture of modernity at all, as it is sometimes supposed to be, but, rather, a description of 'society's' resilience in the face of empire." Class is thus assumed to be the key to every aspect of painting by Manet and his followers, and Professor Clark is sometimes quite cross with those painters whose work fails to support him on this point.

Much of *The Painting of Modern Life* is devoted not so much to painting itself as it is to the work of Baron Haussmann in redesigning and reconstructing the city of Paris in the nineteenth century and to the ways in which painters depicted the life of the city as the result of this work. Professor Clark is very concerned about those artists who are deemed to have failed to grasp the real—which is to say, the class—meaning of this phenomenon. Monet and Renoir, for example, are among those who are given failing grades on this score.

> It should go without saying that this situation—Haussmann's work and its aftermath—[Professor Clark writes] presented painting with as many problems as opportunities. Naturally it offered occasions for a meretricious delight in the modern, or proposals in paint that the street henceforth would be a fine and dandy place. (I cannot see, for example, that Monet's two pictures of *Le Boulevard des Capucines* in 1873 do more than provide that kind of touristic entertainment, fleshed out with some low-level demonstrations of painterliness. Where Monet went, Renoir inevitably

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

followed; his image of the *grands boulevards* in 1875 is untroubled by its subject's meanings, and not helped by this innocence.)

Now it needs to be pointed out, I think, that when Professor Clark writes the words *I cannot see* in this passage, he isn't kidding. He sees only what he wants to see, and he clearly cannot find anything worth looking at in a painting if it fails to denote signs of class distinction, or other evidence of social conflict, with the requisite degree of documentary explicitness. To the extent that he can be said to have an "eye" for anything in painting, it is as an eye for "its subject's meanings." But these "meanings" are rarely, if ever, those determined by the painter. They are entirely predetermined by Professor Clark himself and his "method." Which is to say that he has eyes only for the meanings he has gone in search of, and no other meanings—least of all those which are known to have been of primary interest to the painter in question—have any reality for him.

As for the matter of how painters see their subjects, Professor Clark turns out to be a curious (and sometimes comical) guide. Consider, for example, the famous question of *flatness* in Manet's painting. Professor Clark does not deny, of course, that it is an issue in Manet, but he insists that it is not so much an aesthetic issue as an ideological and social one. Thus, the very term is rejected in the discussion of *Olympia,* for it is deemed insufficient to account for the "circuit of signs" that is held to be responsible for the radical nature of the painting's subject. Yet in speaking of Manet's *Argenteuil, les canotiers,* flatness is accepted because it is found to serve a documentary function in the painting. Taking note of "the unlikely construction of the black straw hat" in this picture, Professor Clark writes: "it has to be said . . . that Manet *found* flatness more than invented it; he saw it around him in the world he knew."

On the other hand, what Monet's eye—the most celebrated "eye" in Impressionist painting—found in the world *he* knew is judged to have little or nothing to do with visual observation and everything to do with the presuppositions of political ideology.

> There is a rule to these paintings [by Monet], and it might be stated roughly as follows [Professor Clark writes]: Industry can be recognized and represented, but not labour; the factories have to be kept still, as if that were the guarantee in an art which pretended to relish the fugitive and ephemeral above all else. Industry must not mean *work*; as long as that fictitious distinction was in evidence, a painting could include as much of the nineteenth century as it liked. The railway, for instance, was an ideal subject because its artifacts could so easily be imagined as self-propelled or self-sufficient. The train went discreetly through the snow . . . .

And so on. Nor was Monet's eye the only one to be governed primarily by social considerations of this sort. Why did Pissarro, at a crucial phase in his development as a painter, turn to the Neo-Impressionist methods of Seurat? Not, according to Professor Clark, for aesthetic reasons—which are never mentioned in this book. What prompted Pissarro's interest in Seurat's pictorial innovations was, it turns out, the burning issue of "leisure in class conflict." (Here the "battlefield of representations" is abandoned in favor of the more familiar Marxist terminology.) Of Neo-Impressionism Professor Clark writes:

> I do not believe that its vehemence (or its appeal to Pissarro) can be understood unless it is seen as deriving from an altered view of leisure, and of art as part of that leisure—which in turn derived from a new set of class allegiances.

I await with interest the monograph which either Professor Clark or one of his students must surely now be preparing for the purpose of tracing the relationship of every one of Pissarro's changes of style to the artist's shifting perception of "class allegiances" in the society of his day. Who knows? In the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

magical world of Marxist dialectics it might even be disclosed to us that it is in this issue of *class* that the key to Pissarro's influence on Cézanne—and perhaps on Matisse, too—is finally to be found. No doubt all will be revealed to us in the fullness of time.

It would be unrewarding to dwell further on Professor Clark's treatment of particular artists or particular works of art in *The Painting of Modern Life*. The field of inquiry which it is the purpose of this book to explore and enlarge upon contributes nothing to our understanding of painting *as art,* and is not meant to. On the contrary, its purpose is to destroy—or, as we say nowadays, deconstruct—the very idea that art is in any sense an autonomous enterprise or that its highest achievements often add up to a good deal more than the sum of the social and material circumstances of its creation. (Also deconstructed in the process—and thrown, as it were, onto the ash heap of history—is the concept of aesthetic intelligence that once governed the Fogg tradition at Harvard.) There is a striking irony in this, of course. For in denying to art the spiritual freedom that it has sought for itself and very often achieved in the modern era—most notably, of course, in precisely those bourgeois capitalist societies which Marxist criticism is most eager to condemn—writers of this persuasion inevitably exhibit a kinship with the kind of reactionary and philistine taste which led so many benighted critics to condemn modernist art in the first place.

I wonder if it isn't, after all, a sense of this kinship which has prompted Professor Clark to devote so much of his intellectual energy, in this book as in his others, to disinterring a great many of the articles and reviews which attacked Manet and his contemporaries in their own day. Professor Clark's devotion to this "lost" critical literature, which he has culled from the annals of nineteenth-century French journalism, amounts at times to an obsession. He can hardly set down three consecutive paragraphs of his own prose without inserting into them some lengthy passage from an obscure review of the exhibitions in which Manet, Seurat, and others showed their work. Excerpts from this vast reservoir of critical writing, usually given in English in the main body of Professor Clark's text and in the original French in the voluminous notes, actually make up a sizable part of *The Painting of Modern Life*—by far the more valuable part, in my opinion. Professor Clark's real gifts are those of a researcher, not a critic. Documents, not art objects, are his forte—which is yet another reason, I suppose, why he is inclined to deal with art objects as if they, too, were little more than social documents. Given his interest in nineteenth-century French art criticism, one rather regrets that Professor Clark hadn't settled for producing an anthology of critical writing along the lines of the collections given us in recent years by Elizabeth Gilmore Holt.[2] But of course it is not in the interest of his political scenario to do so. His quotations from French art criticism, like his "readings" of French paintings as sociological reports, are made to serve a purpose. Both are part of the indictment he has drawn up for the purpose of unmasking modernism itself as a failed revolutionary impulse. What is intolerable to a Marxist like Professor Clark is that modernist art, despite its many and famous conflicts with bourgeois society, has proved in the end to be an essential component of bourgeois culture, and accepted as such. For that reason alone modernism must now stand condemned as a coefficient of capitalism—than which, from a Marxist perspective, no worse crime in the realm of cultural life is conceivable. It must therefore now be discredited and deconstructed to make way for that future "rendezvous," as Professor Clark has called it, between artistic practice and "the only class"—the proletariat, of course—capable of ushering in a new golden age.

It is no wonder, really, that Professor Clark is haunted by the specter of "vulgar"

2 Holt's two major works on the history of art in nineteenth-century Europe are *The Triumph of Art for the Public* (Anchor Press, 1979) and *The Art of All Nations* (Anchor Press, 1981).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Marxism. Some forty-one years ago, in the aftermath of the radical movement of the Thirties, Arthur Koestler wrote an essay called "The Intelligentsia"—it was published in *Partisan Review* and then reprinted in *The Yogi and the Commissar*—in which he discussed the falsity of this Marxist mode of historical analysis. He spoke of "the fatal short cut [taken by Marx and Engels] from Economy to 'Superstructure': that is, culture, art, mass-psychology"—a shortcut that has been endlessly retraced by Marx's intellectual heirs ever since. "Marxian society," Koestler wrote, "has a basement—production, and an attic—intellectual production; the staircase and the lifts are missing." Koestler went on to point out that "it is not as simple as that: the triumphant class creating its own philosophic superstructure to fit its mode of production like a tailored suit." Now despite everything that has happened in the last four decades, and despite the new terminology that is invoked to give this famous "short cut" a new currency, this image of a basement and an attic with the staircase and the lifts missing is, as it happens, a very accurate description of the historical method employed by Professor Clark in the writing of *The Painting of Modern Life*. For much of this book, he rummages around in the basement of nineteenth-century French society, retracing and reinterpreting events in the economic life of the period. To make his ascent from this basement of "production" to the attic, where the form of "intellectual production" called painting is to be found, he is obliged to avail himself of that magic carpet he calls historical materialism. No wonder, then, that when he arrives at his destination he has some difficulty discovering—to use Koestler's other image—a "tailored suit" which entirely pleases him. History is not, after all, a fertile field for the discovery of miracles.

The question to be asked about *The Painting of Modern Life,* and indeed about Professor Clark's entire intellectual enterprise, is: Why? Why now? What accounts for its governing animus, which is a profound and unappeasable hostility to modernist art, and why has it won such a favorable response both inside the academy and out? In attempting to answer such questions, it is no longer sufficient to say that a phenomenon like Professor Clark is part of the price we continue to pay for the political upheavals of the Sixties. This is true as far as it goes—it is indeed the basic truth of the historical situation in which we find ourselves today—but it does not entirely account for the place which this Marxist critique of modern painting now occupies in contemporary cultural life or for its reception among people who believe themselves to be interested in art, people who believe art to be vitally important to their lives.

The answer, I think, lies in the sense of keen disappointment—a disappointment that amounts at times to a feeling of rage—among people of a generally liberal and leftist outlook over recent changes in our relation to the achievements of modern art. Brought up to believe that the essence of the modern movement was to be found in its *révolté* impulses, that in some sense modernism *was* revolutionary in its ultimate goals as well as in its technical and expressive innovations, these people feel betrayed by their discovery—which history has now made all but unavoidable—that they were mistaken, or at least misinformed, about the thing they loved so much and placed so high a value on. Modernism not only did *not* turn out to be, as they were for so long led to assume it was, coextensive with the impulses of political revolutionism, but was in some respects deeply hostile to those impulses and incompatible with them. Modernism really did turn out to be an essential component of bourgeois culture. And to this fact of history, which they now recognize *as* a fact of history, they cannot reconcile themselves. It leaves them bereft of a sense of cultural purpose. Never mind that these disappointed acolytes are the same people, for the most part, whose embrace of modernism has confirmed its central place in bourgeois cultural life. Such paradoxes of history do little to assuage the bitterness of their disappointment. They were brought up, after all, to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

believe that they could have the cake of revolution and eat it too, and now that they have discovered otherwise there is no consoling them. Their grief is great, and it has disposed them to welcome any and all attempts to discredit the achievements of the very thing in which they once placed their fondest hopes.

There remain, of course, for the people I speak of, certain sacred moments in the history of modern art that are exempt from the general condemnation. The Russian avant-garde in the early years of the Bolshevik Revolution, the German Dadaists in the upheaval of the First World War and the German revolution—these, above all, have not lost their luster. For true believers in the doctrine that modernism must remain synonymous with revolutionism if it is not to be despised and rejected, these remain the exemplary episodes in the history of artistic production (as they call it). Hence the loving references to these episodes in Professor Clark's writing. (Hence, too, the whole program of a critical journal like *October,* by the way, which draws its name and indeed its *Weltanschauung* from a similar reading of history.) Hence, above all, the need to discredit the idea of *aesthetic* achievement in art and replace it with scenarios claiming to represent an authentic *social* history of art.

Professor Clark is only one exemplar of this movement which has made such headway in the academy and the art journals (including such eminently bourgeois journals as *Art in America* and *Artforum*) in recent years, and Harvard's is by no means the only department of art history to have felt its influence. Yet precisely because Harvard for so long represented a philosophy of art that has now been made a special object of ideological deconstruction, T. J. Clark's appointment to that faculty has inevitably acquired a significance which reverberates far beyond the groves of academe.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Summer in Obolenskoye
by Alexander Pasternak

Editor's note: Alexander Pasternak (1893-1982) was the younger brother of the poet Boris Pasternak. He was three years Boris's junior. Both of their parents were artists—their father, Leonid Pasternak, a distinguished painter of the Russian Impressionist school, and their mother, Rosa Koffmann, a concert pianist. Alexander Pasternak was an architect by profession and a learned writer on architectural subjects, author of (among other works) a treatise on Methods of Investigating the Architectural Composition of Town Centers in Classic and Western Europe before the Eighteenth Century. *In the Twenties he designed the Karpov Biochemical Institute and collaborated with Melnikov on preparations for the first Lenin Mausoleum. From 1929 to 1933 he and his wife, who was also an architect, worked with Le Corbusier on the Centrosoyuz Building in Moscow. From 1932 to his retirement in 1956 he served on the faculty of the Architectural Institute in Moscow.*

In the last years of his life Alexander Pasternak turned his talents to literature, translating (at his brother's request) Thornton Wilder's novel, The Ides of March, *and writing a memoir,* A Vanished Present, *which evokes with a Proustian delicacy the lost world of his parents' milieu—the world of the cultivated liberal intelligentsia which flourished in Russia in the years preceding the revolutions of 1917—and of his own early life. In that world the art of music, very much including the art of the pianist, occupied a commanding position—not, it should be pointed out, as what we would now call entertainment, but as a medium in which the highest values of civilization were felt to be preserved and transmitted. It was thus a world in which composer-pianists such as Rachmaninoff, Busoni, and Scriabin, who are recalled here with such an intensity of feeling, loomed as heroic figures—representatives not only of grace and beauty but of enlightenment and salvation. This is one aspect of the world we have read about in Boris Pasternak's* Safe Conduct *and* An Essay in Autobiography, *and most famously, of course, in* Doctor Zhivago, *and Alexander Pasternak has now given us another luminous account of it in* A Vanished Present.

It is from this work that "Summer in Obolenskoye" is drawn. The time is the summer of 1903. "We spent [that] summer of 1903 not far from Moscow," the author recalls, "in an estate set in hilly countryside of exceptional beauty and variety . . . . The whole area was remote and underpopulated. The local train used to set down one or two passengers at most, and often none at all. The dacha we first hired was directly opposite the [railway] bridge: our veranda had a wide view over the river-flats and the forest brushing the skyline." It was a setting, incidentally, that Boris Pasternak later used for the suicide scene in Chapter I of Doctor Zhivago.

The translation is by Anne Pasternak Slater, the author's niece, who is also the editor of A Vanished Present.

Excerpted from *A Vanished Present*, by Alexander Pasternak, translated by Anne Pasternak Slater. © 1984 by Anne Pasternak Slater. *A Vanished Present*, a Helen and Kurt Wolff Book, will be published this month by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Almost from the start of our stay at the dacha, my brother and I made fresh discoveries daily. It was Boris's school task for the holidays to collect a herbarium, which he did punctually and methodically, setting it out in attractive order. In pure mimicry, I made my own, much less professional, collection of flowers and grasses. Our pursuit often took us far afield. Then we felt like redskin braves, Leatherleg or Bearbeater, emulating their example in our camouflaged and imperceptible progress, although it was ridiculous to conceal ourselves when we knew quite well that there wasn't a soul for miles around.

If it was very hot we stayed in the forest's fresh shadows. Here grass-collecting gave way to the more absorbing study of woodland life, and our Red Indian antics acquired some justification. Prowling in a new direction through the undergrowth one day, on the trail of nothing in particular, the silence only intensified by squirrel clatter and the rare chirp of a bird, we suddenly heard a snatch of piano-playing far away. Tracking it down became the immediate object of our Red Indian skills, and we wriggled toward it with hardly a sound. At the forest crest our way was barred by an abandoned shrubbery, impenetrably overgrown; in a sunlit grassy plot beyond stood a dacha like our own.

The music came from this dacha. It sounded like somebody practicing, but with a difference—there were no hesitations here, no sticking at difficult bits. At some bar the music would unexpectedly break off; an indistinct muttering was heard, one or two notes were repeated, as though the player were about to take a run at his piece, just as a piano tuner tries separate keys several times over, testing himself, it seems, as well as the instrument. Then the interrupted phrase began again, played with its former unfaltering speed and accuracy, and carried a long way further on, till the grumbling mutter and tuner's repetitive check shifted to a more distant point. Between these interruptions the music ran steadily forward. Boris, understanding more than I, said that the player wasn't practicing or sight-reading, but *composing* for sure.

From that day we made ourselves a perfect hideaway where we could listen without fear of discovery, since there were no dogs at the dacha. The first law of the redksin is to hear and see. By the same token, prying and eavesdropping are outlawed by paleface custom. We knew all this perfectly well, but in the present case neither contradictory law affected us. Music was our only imperative, forcing us to lie low, and listen. Music, after all, had walked beside us from the day of our birth; it had taught us to come to its call, as faithful proselyte and tenderfoot disciple.

Every day my father used to go for a long walk down the Kaluga Highway, a beautiful and generally deserted road. One afternoon he came home in high good humor, and told us, laughing, that he had met a crank coming down the hill. The other fellow, though, wasn't just walking, he was bounding down, flapping his arms like a vulture or eagle trying to take off. If it hadn't been for the rigidly straight course he followed, you'd have thought he was drunk, his gesticulations were so peculiar. But it was quite obvious from his face and dress that he was stone-cold sober—probably he was just a bit touched in the head.

They often met after that. The stranger stayed true to his oddities; although his sobriety was now assured, so was his eccentricity. Finally, they started up a conversation, but even then his bounding gait and arm-waving continued undiminished. It emerged from their first exchange that he was a holiday visitor like my father, that their dacha was way over there, on the crest of that wood (and my father pointed directly to our hideaway), that he was a Muscovite too, called Scriabin, a musician and composer, busy this summer composing his third symphony, which he referred to in conversation as his *Divine Poem*—not as a descriptive adjective, but as its title. From that moment our father, and later our mother as well, made friends with the Scriabin family, and our secret, stolen intimacy with his music came to an end. Thirty years later my brother

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

described it in *Safe Conduct*; in the Fifties he retold it for the second time in *An Essay in Autobiography*.[1] Like a sculptor chipping away the finest final layer of stone, my brother laconically delineated that overwhelming music in its most concentrated form. I have no desire to water his distillation down. There only remain some sequels to that summer for me to tell.

After both families returned to town, the friendship flourished. In Obolenskoye I grew intensely devoted to Vera Ivanovna, Scriabin's wife. She was a most gentle, somehow special person, the embodiment of spiritual tenderness, and I loved her with the deep secret passion of a ten-year-old. In Moscow my chivalric ardor increased. In their family conflicts, whose complexity I partly understood, I naturally took Vera Ivanovna's side, without losing my enraptured admiration for Scriabin's work. When she talked to my mother about hurtful home affairs, she heroically managed to avoid giving my mother grounds for compassion toward her; on the contrary, in these conversations it seemed that Vera Ivanovna was expressing pity for my mother, as though not she, but my mother, was the injured party.

In the Scriabin household I sensed then, and understood for ever after, the bitterness of division between two people who love each other, yet set their artistic vocations higher than the quiet of domestic happiness.

Such childish observations were later often confirmed.

The blow falling on an ordinary couple when they separate is severe enough. Its force is felt even more deeply in a partnership where both members are distinguished by their artistic gifts.[2]

At first the Scriabins visited us together, informally, sometimes accompanied by their children. As friction grew they called separately with increasing frequency. When they finally split up, Scriabin went abroad for a long time, as though to free everyone by his exile. Vera Ivanovna stayed in Moscow as before, giving many successful concerts in

---

1 In the spring of 1903 Father rented a dacha in the country near to Maloyaroslavets on the Bryansk railway (now known as the Kiev Line). It turned out that Scriabin was our neighbour. We had not been on visiting terms with him until then.

The two houses stood at some distance from each other, beside a forest clearing on a hill. We arrived, as usually happens, early in the morning. The sun filtered into the rooms through the low branches which overhung our roof. Inside, bundles wrapped in sacking were cut open, and food, bed linen, frying-pans and pails unpacked. I escaped into the wood.

God Almighty, what that morning wood was filled with! The sunlight pierced it through and through from every side. Its moving shadows tilted its cap this way and that; and from its rising and falling branches came that always unexpected, always unfamiliar chirruping of birds which starts with loud, abrupt calls and, gradually dying down, repeats in its warm quick urgency the alternating lights and shadows of the trees running into the distance. And in exactly the same way as lights and shadows alternated and birds sang and fluttered from branch to branch, so fragments of the Third Symphony or *Divine Poem,* composed upon the piano in the neighbouring house, carried and resounded through the wood . . . .

[Scriabin] and my father would often go for walks along the Warsaw Highway which cut across the countryside not far from our house. Sometimes I accompanied them. Scriabin liked to take a run and then to go on skipping along the road like a stone skimming the water, as if at any moment he might leave the ground and glide on air. In general, he had trained himself in various kinds of sublime lightness and unburdened movement verging on flight. Among such expressions of his character were his well-bred charm and his worldly manner of putting on a superficial air and avoiding serious subjects in society. All the more astonishing were his paradoxes in the course of these country walks.

He argued with my father about good and evil and life and art, he attacked Tolstoy and preached Nietzsche's superman and amoralism. They agreed only in their conception of the essence and problems of craftsmanship, in everything else they differed.—Boris Pasternak, *An Essay in Autobiography,* pp. 42-44.

2 This may be an oblique reference to Boris Pasternak and his first wife, Evgenya Lourié, who was a talented artist.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

which she gradually restricted her repertoire exclusively to Scriabin. She was a fine musician, and since she had spent much of her life in the orbit of her husband's playing, composition, and conversation, she was unquestionably the ideal interpreter of his work. Consequently, perhaps, she was the only Moscow pianist to play his music, and to play it in his own style, while he was abroad. Of course, I can only report my own impressions, which are inevitably open to question, but in those days I heard the same opinion expressed by others who knew the playing of both intimately. I can only add that pianists who specialized in Scriabin's work, such as Konstantin Nikolayevich Igumnov, not to mention my own mother, took Vera Ivanovna as their declared model.

Our entire family spent 1906 in Germany. During that time my parents' friendship with Vera Ivanovna waned, in spite of a correspondence between them; on our return to Moscow a year later the intimacy appeared at first to pick up again, but it faltered and finally petered out altogether. After an absence of several years, Scriabin also returned to Moscow. He seemed to my parents, and indeed to Boris and myself, changed in some way—apparently renewed by theosophic theories of philosophy and art acquired abroad, and by an unprecedented, expansive view of future art, and the clear conception of his own projected compositions. As my brother wrote, "he arrived, and rehearsals for *Extase* began straight away."

Poème de l'Extase was written abroad. The third symphony, whose birth we had witnessed in the bushes of Obolenskoye, was first performed in Russia in the winter of 1906, when we were in Berlin. Its first conductor was Emil Kuper, who was also the first to conduct *Extase.* A few years later Koussevitsky also tried his hand at it, with less success. It is almost certain that Kuper, uniquely, studied it under Scriabin's guidance; the interpretation of such novel music must originally have depended on the composer's explanatory commentary. And of course such authorial assistance could only enhance the conductor's reputation.

From the very first my mother took me to all the rehearsals of *Extase*; Boris often accompanied us. They were held in the large auditorium of the Conservatoire, which was vast and gloomy in its unfamiliar daylight desolation. I felt shy in that resonant half-light: the lightest rustle seemed ready to set off an avalanche. No lamps were lit, and on the oval portraits opposite sunlight lay in bright, vaulted patches, creeping slowly from face to face. Aslant the hall, hewn beams of shimmering air stretched from window to wall; within their shafts bright motes danced like midges, their perpetual play of light a part of the music we heard.

First rehearsals are often most interesting for their interruptions. At the dry tap of the conductor's baton an abrupt silence falls, and a man's weak voice succeeds the full-throated orchestra, authoritatively explaining how that last phrase should be played. A new bar line is picked, and the orchestra begins again, till the next irritable baton rap. In that alternation of sound, silence, and the single voice, the idea of the music seems to grow. Everything finds its beginnings, its bifurcations, ramifications, and final resolutions; independent threads are gathered up and led to a single conclusion. In this case the conclusion was ecstasy—a title which later appeared pretentious to my brother, but which, at that time, expressed for everyone the ecstasy demanded by the music itself. When I heard the first rehearsals (as indeed when I heard the first piano snatches of the third symphony), admittedly there seemed to be only the chaotic clatter and dust of a building in collapse. But the dust settled; the air cleared, and from tumbled disorder each element moved to its proper place, till to our delight, the music built up into a single, coherent edifice. The more we were absorbed by its destruction and restoration, the more rarely the baton tap interrupted the periodic resurgence of chaos for the broken to be made whole, the more clearly we understood the strength and originality of Scriabin's symphonic poem.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I was fifteen at that time; I loved music and listened to it constantly. But did I understand it? On the other hand, what does it matter which pictures were awakened in the mind of a fifth-former, listening overwhelmed to rehearsals of *Extase*? I saw the deluge consuming a condemned earth; I saw the playful Creator in turbulent radiance bellowing "I am." In the peremptory trombones, cutting short all that went before, solid structures and intertwining ornamentations rose before me; the French horns, raised in unison toward the end, sang like a clear female choir; and in the final bars the full orchestra set sail like a clipper in full rig, triumphantly driving through wave and storm. The first chime of a bell rang out, rose, and rolled over orchestra and auditorium, a flood of thanksgiving drenched in might and joy and love of life.

However often I heard that music, knowing in advance what instrument entered next and how each phrase would unfold, I still reached the finale shaking, bathed in a cleansing sweat as of glad and heavy labor. After Kuper and Koussevitsky, subsequent interpretations, bit by bit, diverged from the original tones which had derived in all probability from the composer himself. Now the bell is replaced by a metal tube; the French horns no longer sing out with a woman's voice, and, alas, no clipper gallantly sets sail through wave and storm . . .

In those years I took particular pleasure in music, studied the violin to little effect, attended nearly all the concerts of the time, and heard excellent music constantly at home. I had the good fortune to hear performances by three outstanding pianists: Rachmaninoff, Busoni, and Scriabin. All three differed in every way: from character, behavior, and manner of interpretation to choice of program. Their styles of playing confirmed these differences, yet left them on the same lofty plane of achievement.

Rachmaninoff was always stern and unsmiling, his movements simple and spare. He played his own and others' compositions equally well, as though fulfilling a religious duty; the idea of service properly conveys the ascetic seriousness of his attitude. Every aspect of his personality, as composer, pianist, conductor, and individual of great gentleness and spiritual strength, was expressed in the sobriety and scrupulous simplicity of his performance. He usually appeared not in the conventional coat and tails, but classic frock-coat (the conductor Nikisch did the same). His playing always impressed by its masculinity: it was succulent as well as dry, somehow heavily dropping. Everyone knew his wide range, which was the envy of other musicians. He had least success with Chopin, in my view, although few must be granted the skill to play Chopin in Chopin's own manner. (And who actually knows how Chopin played?)

A performer's character is usually betrayed by the way he sits at his instrument. Rachmaninoff sat at the piano as prosaically as at his desk or dinner table, a bowl of soup before him, quite forgetting the many eyes fixed on him. That's how I remember him: straight back, lightly inclined head, motionless torso, all the force of impact concentrated in his fingers, his back evidently lending no force to that inimitable *fortissimo*.

Busoni was the exact opposite. At the piano he struck me as a maniac enraptured by the music he transmitted, not controlling, but controlled by it, utterly in its sway. I don't know how he appeared off the concert platform, but I cannot believe that he could ever be free of music, even in his dreams. When he sat at the piano—lay on it, rather—he was drawn deep into a world of sound, till neither hall, public, or he himself appeared to exist. Deaf and oblivious himself, his insouciance infected the audience, which registered his supplementary mumbling hum, and forgave it. He was forgiven, too, his apparent indifference to the effect of his performance, bolting offstage, barely acknowledging the ovations of the auditorium with a curt nod of the head. As this habit became known, his delighted admirers gave up clustering beside the stage, clapping and clamoring for an encore.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Busoni excelled at Bach. The distinct notes and rich timbre extracted by him suggested an organ tone. Playing more slowly than is usual for Bach, he gave the impression of improvising, lost in some distant mood of his own.

And Scriabin?

Before describing Scriabin as a performer, let me digress into history. It is easy to imagine that a musician plays like Rachmaninoff, for instance, although he will never reach the quality of Rachmaninoff's playing, or like Egon Petri, or Busoni. People played "like" Medtner. That "like" was tagged to many idols, none of whom reached the perfection of their originals. I remember, for instance, how Josef Hofmann played; he reigned supreme as the acknowledged interpreter of Chopin. Everyone imitated him. Unfortunately, it is quite impossible to listen to the recordings of those times; Grieg plays like a three-year-old; Hofmann, who seemed at the time to unite everything Chopin stood for, is insufferable now, he is musically so helpless. It is better not even to think about Ravel's recordings. Yet in talking about them we can imagine some approximation of how they might have played.

To play "like" Scriabin, though, was a total impossibility. He was unique, in the sense that in his case even the idea of "playing the piano" defied imitation. This was no ordinary playing, whose sounds, tones, strengths or weaknesses could be reproduced. Of course Scriabin had all that, but it receded to a secondary plane. In the foreground was his utterly idiosyncratic attitude to his instrument, and *this* was the unrepeatable secret known only to Scriabin.

It is strange: I have no memory of Scriabin on the concert platform, although I often heard his public performances. But I remember perfectly how he played in the sitting room at home. It was here that I was struck by the persistent something, which was always the same, regardless of what pieces he chose and what mood he was in—precisely that quality which I have never experienced in anyone else's playing, before or since.

It is difficult to explain exactly. But as soon as the piano sounded, even if I sat with my eyes shut, I instantly knew that his fingers elicited the music not by dropping down on the keys and striking them (which was, of course, the factual reality), but by lightly plucking his fingers free of the keyboard. You had the complete illusion that he was drawing out of the piano a sequence of sounds constant in their light, curt force. His critics said that this was not piano-playing at all, but cats mewing and birds twittering. And yet, for all his lightness of touch, Scriabin's *forte* was twice as strong as that of the ordinary pianist, although it lacked the mannerisms traditionally proclaiming a "difficult" passage—undue crashing down on the keys, emphatic pumping at the pedals and so on. His Scriabinesque *forte* was achieved by the contrast between it and his normal, chiming tone, and yet within the spectrum of his own sound such contrasts were great enough to achieve the right effect.

The spiritual lightness so characteristic of everything he did was reflected in his playing as in his way of walking, gesticulating, and tossing his head in conversation. It was natural and instinctive to him, not a theatrical affectation. On the contrary, his whole appearance, the suits he wore, the way he presented himself, were all directed to the least artistic effect possible. At the piano he always sat further than usual from the keyboard, leaning with his head tilted back. Hence the impression that his fingers did not drop onto the keys, but fluttered above them. Everything together created that light sound which was the chief beauty of his playing.

Although many first-class pianists performed his music well (for instance, Sofronitsky and Neuhaus), their playing could not, and did not give the same light, fluttering impression I remember so well. But in some pieces, like the fourth and seventh sonatas, *Vers la flamme,* and *Fragilité,* Stanislav Neuhaus almost achieved that "uncoordinated" and nervous playing so characteristic of Scriabin.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In conclusion I would like to return to a last, apparently trivial, detail from the summer of 1903.

Some way from the Scriabin household, the last of the three dachas on the Obolenskoye estate had been rented out to a group of students, either from an orphanage or an old-fashioned seminary. They were sometimes to be seen, dressed in their summer uniform of dark-grey, high-necked jackets, with brass-buckled, black leather belts like the ones we wore at school, lugubriously herding like cattle down to the river for a swim. They were a beefy, inoffensive lot, evidently members of the church school choir, and were accompanied by their supervisor, a precentor, and a servant. Often as I eavesdropped on Scriabin's gradually unfolding *Divine Poem,* transported from our hideaway in Obolenskoye into the world of my dreams, I was nearly shaken out of the bushes by the bovine bellow of a helicon breaking the summer peace, backed by a clatter of cymbals and a bass drum—the orchestra of lunkheads beyond the trees.

The piano-playing would break off at once. The orchestra's enthusiasm died as abruptly as it had been born. Complete silence fell. A bird cheeped, and the *Divine Poem* would begin again. Under such apparently insufferable conditions an entirely new music came into being.

Ever since, listening to the *Divine Poem* in its completed, orchestral form, I find myself starting at the affirmative "I am" of the familiar, exulting brass trumpet, rising clear above the orchestra. Involuntarily, I find myself again in the bushes on those bright, clear mornings; the sound of piano-playing is broken off by that sudden, all-engulfing brass bray . . . and a blasphemous thought occurs to me. That deep trumpet call, gloomy as an echo of the Last Trumpet, is extended and lightened in its development, recurring in the passages proclaiming the joy of struggle and conquest, the Bacchic revels, and the final strains, bringing blessed rest after glad labor. Is it not some kind of comment, the transfiguration of the pointless lowing of the bass tuba in the woods behind the dacha, the transformation of bovine force into the celebration of mind and will? It is not for me to say. But it is surely conceivable that such a nothing should have its undisputed right of place in the music of a creative genius.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

American literary radicalism in the Twenties

by James W. Tuttleton

Writing in the current issue of *Dissent* (Winter, 1985), David Bromwich—associate professor of English at Princeton and author of a recent study of William Hazlitt—reflected on the phenomenon of "Literary Radicalism in America" as a means of ascertaining the effect of American literary avant-gardes on the politics and art of this country. In the course of his essay, he adverts to *The New Criterion* and to its writers as being engaged in the effort to "invent cultural conservatism in America," a task he evidently finds lacking in high seriousness, if not vain. I should not have said that this was the general aim of the journal, since cultural conservatism has been a constant fact of American life and is reflected in our jurisprudence and law, in aspects of our politics and religion, in the human sciences, in social and intellectual history, and in our art and criticism. It therefore cannot be invented, although cultural conservatism can provide a perspective from which to interrogate the conditions of American culture.

Bromwich is clearly right to suggest that the conservative wishes "to guard" at least some of "the values already in place" in American society. But his reduction of conservative thought to a set of judgments dictated by "a sequence of implicit equations: taste = inherited opinions = rules = norms (=social norms)" is so breathtaking an oversimplification of any serious conservative critique of American culture that the mind can do nothing with it. But I know of no serious conservative who is unwilling to scrutinize the problems of taste, inherited opinions, rules, and norms. In the long run, the conservative will likely conclude that there is some valuable wisdom to be gained from the past and he will want to affirm and defend that. In fact, the conservative meditation on the cultural forms by which wisdom is transmitted from the past is far more intellectually flexible and alive than Mr. Bromwich's equational reductionism.

In any case, the burden of Mr. Bromwich's essay is somewhat different—to hold out for our consideration two radical avant-garde groups who have deeply affected the course of American literature and to meditate on their suggestiveness for the future. These two groups are: 1) Emerson and the circle connected to him at *The Dial* in the 1840s (only Margaret Fuller is mentioned); and 2) "their successors," whom Bromwich lists as William James, Van Wyck Brooks, Randolph Bourne, and John Dewey—"those social critics whose work began in earnest about 1915." The intent of his essay would appear to be expressed in his statement that "The legacy of Emerson, Fuller, James, Dewey, Bourne, and Brooks is what we still have to build on."

Now the politics of dissent can sometimes make strange bedfellows, so nothing will seem odder than this collection of disparate minds brought into unnatural intercourse under the cover of "literary radicalism." What is, after all, the common bond

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

between the Emerson, whose essential genius was to commend consciousness over against society (which he called "a conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members"), and Brooks, who espoused a redistributive socialism more revolutionary than that of Howells, a Christian Socialist, and other progressive-era "men of good hope"?

What is the link between Emerson and Bourne, who had little to say about Emerson but who acclaimed the cultural determinism espoused in Edward Thorndike's *Individuality* (1911) and who—in "The Next Revolution"—commended "the three cardinal propositions of Marx—the economic interpretation of history, the class struggle, and the exploitation of the workers by capitalistic private ownership of the means of production"? Bourne had at the end of his life, incidentally, no use for Dewey's instrumentalism, which he saw as a tool for justifying America's entry into World War I. And Brooks likewise found in pragmatism's emphasis on "social efficiency" a lack of idealistic vision. Brooks is inescapably clear, in *Letters and Leadership* (1918), that James and Dewey "failed us," and not merely failed us but "traduced us" by their devotion to the given, to the "existing fact," that is, by their acceptance of the socio-economic status quo. For Brooks, who took his cue from Bourne, pragmatism was "the dog in the manger of the creative life."

Emerson found the revolutionary agenda by which the status quo was to be transformed as distasteful as the organized party politics by which American political life, in his time, expressed itself. "Hence," he observed in "Politics,"

> the less government we have the better,—the fewer laws, and the less confided power. The antidote to this abuse of formal government is the influence of private character, the growth of the Individual; the appearance of the principal to supersede the proxy; the appearance of the wise man; of whom the existing government is, it must be owned, a shabby imitation. That which all things tend to educe; which freedom, cultivation, intercourse, revolutions, go to form and deliver, is character; that is the end of Nature, to reach unto this coronation of her king. To educate the wise man the State exists, and with the appearance of the wise man the State expires. The appearance of character makes the State unnecessary. The wise man is the State.

Bromwich observes that "Since Emerson, the project of literary radicalism has never been isolable from an ambition to reform our social arrangements." But as Emerson's remarks make plain, this reform will arise only as a consequence of the moral reform of single individuals who aspire to wisdom and character, not as a consequence of socialistic movements which subordinate the individual to the state. Emerson would in fact have been appalled at the veneration of the state in twentieth-century radical politics of the Left. In this his thought has a conservative cast, which will make it irreconcilable with statist ideologies.

The socialists at Brook Farm, according to Emerson, had a noble intent in wishing to institute a Fourierist phalanx at West Roxbury, Massachusetts, in 1841. But the intent was based on a misunderstanding of human reality in its social and sexual character, and its productive commodity constituted a mere competition with that of the surrounding farmers. In "Historic Notes of Life and Letters in New England," Emerson praised the noble intentions of the reformers who tried to induce him to join their commune, but he accounted for his refusal in observing that

> in spite of the assurances of its friends that it was new and widely discriminated from all other plans for the regeneration of society, we could not exempt it from the criticism which we apply to so many projects for reform with which the brain of the age teems. Our feeling was that Fourier had skipped no fact but one, namely Life. He treats man as a plastic thing, something that may be put up or down, ripened or retarded, moulded, polished, made into solid or fluid or gas, at the will of the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> leader; or perhaps as a vegetable, from which, though now a poor crab, a very good peach can by manure and exposure be in time produced,—but skips the faculty of life, which spawns and scorns system and system-makers; which eludes all conditions; which makes or supplants a thousand phalanxes and New Harmonies with each pulsation.

For Emerson, in practical terms, Brook Farm failed because there was "no head," because "intellectual sans-culottism" and impulse ruled. But the condition of failure was implicit in the plan. And what he said about the vision of the Brook Farm reformers might be said of any such socialist utopian scheme: "The mistake is that this particular order and series is to be imposed, by force or preaching and votes, on all men, and carried into rigid execution."

Emerson's idea of politics, then, is indeed radical, but it is radical in its aversion to the very concept of political organization; and it is grounded epistemologically on the priority of the unarguable moral intuition as an affirmation of the Divine Will. Such a view presents its problems for the conservative as well, who will not have a perfectibilitarian view of human possibility, or a belief in the direct apprehension of divine reality through transcendental intuition. But the conservative will assent to Emerson's emphasis on the individual, his critique of statism, and his disbelief in impractical utopianism. In retrospect, Emerson was right to call the Brook Farm experiment "a perpetual picnic, a French Revolution in small, an Age of Reason in a patty-pan." Consequently, Emerson does not well serve the radicalism of Brooks and Bourne, for whom a collectivist mentality led them in the direction of a vague undoctrinaire socialism expressed in *The New Republic, Seven Arts, The Freeman,* and in other journals of the Teens and Twenties. And, finally, Emerson's politics will not well serve the purposes of *Dissent.* For his emphasis is always on the priority of mind, of consciousness, and of individual self-reformation as the instrument of the amelioration of social ills.

To present Emerson as the radical predecessor of socialist critics of the 1920s, like Bourne and Brooks, is also to ignore the whole history of developing socialist thought in the 1880s and '90s, evident in both party politics and in literary works by Howells, Bellamy, London, and others. These are of course lesser figures than Emerson; thus there is always a tendency to co-opt the best major figure of the past as the spiritual father of whatever may be the current movement. But the progressives I have named are the real American forebears of Brooks and Bourne, Floyd Dell and John Reed, Waldo Frank and Max Eastman—even as George Ripley, C. A. Dana, Warren Burton and William Henry Channing at Brook Farm are the American predecessors of the *fin-de-siècle* "men of good hope."

In fact, none of the major artists of the American Renaissance, as F. O. Matthiessen called it—not Emerson, Thoreau, Dickinson, Melville, Hawthorne, or even Whitman —will serve as an adequate foundation, in political and economic terms, for the socialist reconstitution of America called for by literary radicals in the 1920s, although since these are the memorable figures, one or another of them is recurrently hailed as the significant predecessor.

Much of Van Wyck Brooks's conception of the American experience and American literature is, in retrospect, hardly adequate —even, I should imagine, for literary radicals. The reason for this is plain: in respect to our significant writers, it is widely understood that Brooks manipulated the facts of our literary past in order to prove a thesis about the inadequacy of American culture as nutriment for the writer. I am particularly speaking here of Van Wyck Brooks before 1930, not of the later author of the comprehensive "Makers and Finders" series. That impressive multi-volume literary history is not marked by the socialist extravagances of Brooks's youth; it deals with our past more in historical and literary than in ideological and political terms. But in his youth Brooks's cultural disgust with America overwhelmed his perception of the literature before him. I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

need not go into his fantastic arguments about Twain's genius being thwarted by the frontier experience, which Bernard De Voto demolished years ago, nor his dubious interpretation of Henry James's expatriation, which biographers and critics have long ago corrected. Nor, finally, can one commend his understanding of Emerson, who provoked in him "a persistent spleen."

Yet in one respect Brooks was right about Emerson: he intuited that Emerson's individualism could be translated into the *laissez-faire* capitalist's advocacy of commodity and power. As Brooks conceded in *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915), "if the logical result of a thorough-going, self-reliant individualism in the world of the spirit is to become a saint, it is no less true that the logical result of a thorough-going, self-reliant individualism in the world of the flesh is to become a millionaire." In consequence, Emerson's views were never "inconveniently inconsistent with the facts and requirements of business life." They therefore served to support the economic status quo. Bromwich disagrees with this reading of Emerson by Brooks, for he wishes to salvage Emerson for the tradition of radical Left politics. But as John Gerber demonstrated some years ago, in "Emerson and the Political Economists" (*New England Quarterly,* 1949), Emerson's economic views tried to "combine socialistic ends with capitalistic means" and thus proved incompatible with communistic experiments.

Brooks was highly critical of Emerson and his Transcendental circle for what might be called the absence in them of rigorous intellectual discrimination. He complained of them as "that queer miasmatical group of lunar phenomena, in which philosophy, self-culture, politics, art, social reform and religion were all mixed up and all felt to be, in some vague way, the same thing." This is a highly perceptive insight. But I wish to extend it in order to suggest that it is true of many American avant-garde literary groups. It was manifestly true of the generation of Brooks and Bourne, although living in it, and aflame with their passions and enthusiasms, they were not prepared to see that such an objection might be raised against themselves. But let me extend this yet one step further.

To co-opt Emerson and William James for the purposes of Left political radicalism is of a piece with the intellectual muddlement evident in the *Partisan Review* circle of the 1930s and '40s, who attempted forcibly to yoke together Trotskyist politics and Eliotic artistic modernism. That project revealed a bizarre misunderstanding of both philosophical horizons. Although it constitutes a minor scandal in recent American critical thought about the relation of politics and literature, Bromwich is disposed to gloss over the contradiction implicit in the *Partisan Review* position and even to celebrate it as constituting "a new conception of intellectual freedom," as being an instance of a "style of cultural tolerance."

Whatever may be the virtues of cultural tolerance and intellectual freedom, and they are many, they are purchased, in this case, at the cost of intellectual consistency. In the Twenties, amongst the more lucid radicals of the time, these things were understood more clearly. V. F. Calverton, writing in "American Literary Radicalism" (*Modern Quarterly,* September-December, 1926), acknowledged that many literary modernists were radical in literary technique while conservative in socio-political ideology. He took no comfort in this; nor did he see this contradiction as a means of effecting the Revolution. Max Eastman, as editor of *The Masses,* claimed to be hospitable to intellectual diversity, but in some remote part of his mind he understood that some of his contributors praised modernist literary radicalism without understanding its contradiction to a "correct" politics. Writers like Bourne and Brooks wanted to give intellectual "leadership" to the Revolution; but Eastman made it perfectly plain in *The Liberator* in 1921 that writers and critics, the young intellectuals, would need "guidance and careful watching by the practical and theoretical workers of the movement." This point of view came to full fruition in the Thirties,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when the Stalinist theoreticians made it plain to Leftist writers and intellectuals that even the truth would have to be sacrificed for "the greater social good." This was more than even Eastman could stomach. But looking back on the immediate postwar years, Eastman told Ely Estorick in 1931, as reported in Calverton's *The Liberation of American Literature,* "I suppose that the most unique and important feature of the old *Masses* . . . was that while maintaining an editorial policy essentially Marxian it drew into its pages the works of wide circles of the intelligentzia who had revolutionary feeling, but *no understanding of such a policy and very little conception of what it was all about*" (italics added).

I am not sure that Bromwich knows what it was all about. And certainly Brooks and Bourne lacked the foresight and insight to know what it was all about, to know what was being asked of them by Eastman, John Reed, and the political radicals just before and after World War I. The *Masses* and *Liberator* group knew what it was all about: they knew what they wanted, and what they wanted was an American revolution along the Soviet line. What it was all about the events themselves, as they unfolded in the Thirties, made plain. The Stalinist agenda, like the Fourierist, was to impose its regimen, "by force or preaching and votes, on all men," to carry it "into rigid execution." Brooks, Bourne, and the young intelligentsia hadn't the wit to foresee the enormity of such a social engineering scheme. They wanted to ventilate a moral contempt for big business, puritanism, Comstockery, prohibition, and the older generation.

Especially the older generation. "The Apostolic 'Student Movement,' or, the Priests of Young America" is how Daniel Aaron, in *Writers on the Left* (1961), has rightly characterized the "League of Youth" clustered around Bourne and Brooks—Lewis Mumford, Waldo Frank, James Oppenheim, Paul Rosenfeld, and, to some extent, Walter Lippmann. We should make a distinction here between the political radicals of the Twenties and the literary radicals I have just named. Yet the latter largely gave themselves to the idea of political revolution.

Bourne advised Brooks that the liberalism of *The New Republic* (Croly, Lippman, Dewey) was lacking in "youthful violence" and was too "priggish." In "The State," Bourne annexed Marx to Charles Beard's economic determinism (in *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* [1913]) in order to equate, as Lenin had done, capitalism and imperialism with war. Not for nothing did *The New Masses* create, after his death in 1918, the Randolph Bourne Memorial Award. They wanted to honor a radical who, at the end, said that he felt "very much out of touch with my times, except perhaps with the Bolsheviki." Perhaps it was Lewis Mumford who most clearly spoke their faith: they wished, he said in *The Forum* in 1930, for "an uprising on the part of the downtrodden, who would overthrow the master class and bring about a regime of equality and brotherhood." Mumford, like Brooks, of course outlived Bourne, who died in the influenza epidemic, and both outlived their radical ideas. But it is important to remember them as they were in the Teens and Twenties. Speaking of the clarion call to youth in *Letters and Leadership,* Bourne told Brooks that "There is a certain superb youthful arrogance in your implication that it is we and our friends who are to be masters," to be directors, that is, of America's revolutionary coming-of-age. Of course they thought they were equal to the task.

With their repudiation of the past and their emphasis on youth, Brooks and Bourne created the conditions under which Floyd Dell, in all seriousness, could dismiss the nineteenth century and all that it meant: "We can now discount almost to worthlessness—for our own purposes—the greater part of what New England took the trouble to say," he intoned in *Intellectual Vagabondage* (1926). For this young coterie of literary and political radicals, "We had our own lives to live—and all these classical utterances of the nineteenth century literature had no relation to our lives." So much for the utility

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Emerson and his circle at *The Dial.*

About the most that can be said for Van Wyck Brooks and the members of the Apostolic Student Movement of the period 1915-1930—and I fix the time precisely, since a number of its members outgrew their youthful views—is that they were young, brash, estranged from their own culture, sentimentally utopian but without an understanding of the political consequences of their ideas, and without political foresight. However noble may be the goals of equality, brotherhood, and spiritually fulfilling labor, the Brooks-Bourne tradition through 1930 (which, by the way, refused itself connection with the Emerson, James, Dewey line) serves mostly as a cautionary instance—like the counterculture movement of the 1960s—of the effects on idealism of passionate incompetence.

I go into these matters because two recent publications—Gorham Munson's *The Awakening Twenties: A Memoir-History of a Literary Period*[1] and Bruce Clayton's *Forgotten Prophet: The Life of Randolph Bourne*[2]—raise anew the question of literary radicalism in the era of Bourne and Brooks. Clayton's biography is generally a sensible work in that it characterizes Bourne's life and work fully and fairly and submits it to judgment. It is original in its research into unpublished materials and is informed by the erudition of a professional historian. But while there is much to commend in the book—the tactful and judicious use of Erikson's theories of personality development, the sympathetic yet critical portrait of Bourne and his friends—readers will be dismayed at Clayton's uncritical approval of Bourne's unjustified argument that war is the health of the (capitalist) state. There is much to commend in Bourne: his right-minded cultural pluralism, his claims on behalf of intelligence and art, his triumph over his personal handicap. But his conception of state capitalism and war reveals a grotesque Leninist distortion that appears to have seduced not only ideologue historians of liberalism like Charles Forcey and Robert Wiebe but Clayton as well. It is well worth remembering, and emphasizing, that Bourne's antiwar rhetoric was wildly Anglophobic, that his admiration for German *Kultur* was never far below the surface, and that many articulate socialists disagreed with Bourne and approved the war as a just response to the German barbarities in France and Belgium.

Munson's memoir-history subjects the Twenties to a critique by one who was deeply involved in the Brooks-Bourne milieu. Munson died in 1969, but he had completed a nearly finished draft of the book, which has now been polished by his widow Elizabeth Delza and the press editors. It is not a compelling book on the level of mind; nor is its style worth commending. Certain chapters seem choppy, and the book is backbroken by the irreconcilable double intention signified by its subtitle. But it is not without its interest in relation to the problematic of literary radicalism in America.

We have had many such books in the past half century: Malcolm Cowley's *Exile's Return,* Matthew Josephson's *Life Among the Surrealists,* Harold Loeb's *The Way It Was,* Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast,* and Brooks's *Days of the Phoenix.* What does Munson have to add? First, another perspective on personal interrelations amongst writers and artists, editors and publishers whom he knew well: Hart Crane, Carl Van Vechten, John Reed, Floyd Dell, Waldo Frank, Alfred Stieglitz, Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Bourne and Brooks, Margaret Anderson, Jane Heap, Mable Dodge, Emma Goldman, Herbert Croly, Eugene O'Neill, George Bellows, William Sommer, Marsden Hartley, Man Ray, and others. Second, he tries to see these figures as composing a generation of the avant-garde in the arts. He is not so much inter-

1 *The Awakening Twenties: A Memoir-History of a Literary Period,* by Gorham Munson: Louisiana State University Press, 384 pages, $19.95.

2 *Forgotten Prophet: The Life of Randolph Bourne,* by Bruce Clayton: Louisiana State University Press, 320 pages, $25.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ested in politics as he is in describing what Pound had called for in "Patria Mia" (1913), an "American Risorgimento," or "intellectual awakening," in which the arts would lead the way.

In his essay on "Advance-Guard Writing in America: 1900-1950," Paul Goodman has argued that "An artist does not know that he is advance-guard, he must be told so or learn it from the reaction of the audience." But as we have seen, most of these figures claimed themselves to be an avant-garde almost before they had written a line. If they called themselves *les jeunes,* it was, thanks to Bourne and Brooks, without a trace of irony. Munson describes himself and his friends as flushed with "the opportunity to rebel and fulfill themselves." For them, every manifestation of the new art and letters was a "revival of the national spirit," an occasion for enthusiasm—largely, one might add, an undiscriminating enthusiasm. Munson details in near rhapsodic terms what life in the bohemia of Greenwich Village meant, what enthusiasm was generated, at the Washington Square Book Shop, by each new issue of *The Little Review, The New Republic, The Nation, The Dial, Vanity Fair, The Smart Set, Seven Arts,* and *Secession*—the last of which Munson edited with Matthew Josephson and Kenneth Burke. (He conspicuously omits *The Masses* and *Liberator.*)

As befitting his historical intent, Munson introduces our time to the editors of these and other then-popular magazines, reprints their manifestos, and summarizes their typical content. He offers extended discussion of the publishers of the avant-garde in the 1920s—Alfred Knopf, Boni and Liveright, B. W. Huebsch, Charles Scribner, and Harcourt, Brace, and Howe. Munson recreates the art world of the Armory Show of 1913 and the Woodstock colony of painters and writers then flourishing, as well as the evenings of animated talk at Mabel Dodge's salon or the studio of Rosetta O'Neill. All of this adds up to intellectual and artistic ferment of an intense order. But what was it grounded on, for Munson, and what were its fruits?

With respect to its politics, insofar as Munson and his circle had an identifiable politics, we have already noted how Bourne and Brooks, together with Charles Beard and others, had predisposed *les jeunes* toward a perpetual revolution that would somehow lead to socialism. Bourne, who had been a member of the Intercollegiate Socialist Society at Columbia ("the brainchild," according to Clayton, "of Jack London and Upton Sinclair"), electrified Munson with arguments such as this, from "For Radicals": in America, wrote Bourne, "the very food we eat, the clothes we wear, the simplest necessities of life . . . have their roots somewhere, somehow, in exploitation and injustice. It is a cardinal necessity of the social system under which we live that this should be so, where the bulk of the work of the world is done, not for human use and happiness, but primarily and directly for the profits of masters and owners." Munson and the others thrilled to Bourne's invocation of the Wobblies as the true "revolutionary Socialists." Clayton correctly sees how much of Bourne's youthful Marxism was "schoolboy rhetoric." But other schoolboys, like Munson, whatever their age, were electrified by the daring of such pronouncements.

One can see this in Munson's enchantment with Waldo Frank's *Our America* (1919), which intoned the socialist denunciation of America. "Our America," for *les jeunes,* was "the America of cultural radicals and social radicals, 'the men who listen to Stieglitz, and have not quite joined him in their mind with the example of Bill Haywood.'" For *les jeunes,* the America of the Founding Fathers was "Their America," whereas "Our America began with Thoreau, Lincoln, and Whitman." This was heady stuff to young Munson, and it led him to write *Waldo Frank: A Study* (1923), in which Frank's genius and the new faith were stoutly proclaimed.

But Munson obviously could not reconcile his literary interests and the political radicalism of his contemporaries. He perhaps changed more rapidly than any of them. Particularly, he could not reconcile

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his growing belief in Jeffersonianism ("that government is best which governs least") with the statism of Marx, Shaw, Wells, Eastman, Gold, and the rest. Thereupon ensued what Munson called his period of "philosophic anarchism," which was stimulated by the contributors to *The Freeman*. An amalgam of vague notions proclaimed by Albert Jay Nock, Francis Neilson, Emma Goldman, and Margaret Anderson, this anarchism of Munson's led him to abandon electoral politics "on principle," to attack the liberalism of *The Nation* and *The New Republic,* which he had formerly espoused, and to regard the state as "fundamentally anti-social." The task at hand, said *The Freeman,* was to improve the state "off the face of the earth, not by blowing up office-holders, as Mr. [A. Mitchell] Palmer appears to suppose, but by the historical processes of strengthening, consolidating and enlightening economic organization." When we recollect that the enlightenment of the economic organization proposed by these anarchists rested upon the ideas of Henry George (the unearned increment, the single tax), the absurdity of the position becomes manifest. Munson himself eventually came to realize the untenability of his situation:

> Having been in rapid succession a liberal, a socialist, a supporter of the Soviets, I had called myself for a couple of years a philosophical anarchist . . . . Anarchism was an emotional choice; I waved the question of practicality. The vision of Kropotkin would prove practical in the washing, I told myself . . . . Looking back, it seems I had an ambition without a clear goal and a vague sense of dissatisfaction with current American writing without a fixed viewpoint to give meaning to my dissatisfaction.

This is a remarkable admission. It expresses the impulse, fitfully evident in the book, to reconstitute the Twenties as a time of diversely energetic enterprises, in art and social thought, yet one lacking principle, lacking a clear understanding of what America was all about, of what philosophically and historically was meant by the notion of the individual and the state, and of what the role of literature and criticism might be within the state. Being young geniuses together, then, had produced a Twenties version of the intellectual follies. Although Munson tries to remain as impersonal as possible, truth breaks in with all her matter-of-fact in this extraordinary assessment of the time:

> But taking a retrospective view of those days . . . , I will venture the remark that if the word for the Yellow Nineties is pretty *infantilism,* the word for the Twenties is *arrogant juvenility.* Perhaps that is why I cannot, in the manner of several chroniclers of the early jazz age, review my immersion in it with romantic regret over time's passing. The period was something to be outgrown.

One appreciates the candor and self-criticism of this remark. It is an older and perhaps wiser man's reflection on the excesses and confusions of his youth. It witnesses to a truth that has been obscured by the self-serving memoirs of its survivors who have romanticized their intellectual, artistic, and political muddlement under the banner of liberal values.

Perhaps the central issue is thought, meditation, reflection on principles, and the consequences of abandoning reason to feeling. For Bourne, "too much rationality makes a man mercenary and calculating," as he observed in "The Experimental Life." Bourne preferred the monitions of the heart as "usually better than the logic of the head, and the consistency of sympathy is superior as a rule for life to the consistency of the intellect." This represents a perilous anti-intellectualism for youths who aspire to criticize culture and is implicitly dismissive of historical understanding. Jefferson, Madison, Hamilton, Franklin, and the others had already worked out the logic of our constitutional democracy, established the essential arguments for our system of political, economic, and civil rights, had already considered and rejected the alternative that seemed a novelty in the Twenties to *les*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

jeunes. The formulation of the Framers was not yet perfect, as they understood, but it was susceptible to rational change, based on an electoral consensus. Especially they understood what Emerson was later to call, in "Politics," the "law for man" and the "law for property," each of which will always assert its claim, both together making up our life in society. But *les jeunes* were impatient with rationality and accumulated experience; they were deficient in historical understanding, insufficiently educated in polity. Their critique of property rights in the name of economic redistribution, based on admirable enough humanitarian feeling, produced in the Twenties both a longing to overthrow the system—through labor violence, if need be, as Big Bill Haywood proposed—and the reactionary excesses of state authority in the form of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer. Between perpetual revolution and reactionary repression the American people were somehow supposed to make a choice. It is not a matter of luck that neither type of extremism succeeded in carrying the day. The constitutional safeguards to American liberty and legal provisions for social order contained, despite much testing and some failures, both the kind of violence Haywood propounded and the repressive intolerance of the embattled authorities.

Munson's Twenties is not, then, after all, the Twenties of socialist revolutionism. Nor is it the Twenties of the Jazz Age, the Lost Generation, the Waste Land cult of cynicism, the era of Flaming Youth, Bohemianism, and indiscriminate debunking. Pretty much, for Munson, the immediate excitations of Freudianism, Jungianism, Constructivism, Futurism, Imagism, Vorticism, Cubism, Skyscraperism, and Dadaism were versions of an energy without a clear principle or objective, a manifestation of the confusion of the times. In retrospect, Munson cannot see what he once saw in Waldo Frank, and he is certain that Irving Babbitt's New Humanism offered more than its critics would allow. An instance of the speed with which Munson was growing out of the jejune romanticism of the Twenties is his book *Robert Frost: A Study in Sensibility and Good Sense* (1927), which found Frost's conservative "classicism" an antidote to the anarchy of the times.

Anarchy may seem an exaggerated term, but Munson's account of Malcolm Cowley's Dadaist phase will perhaps clarify a period which, for sheer literary inanity, is matched only by the 1960s. Munson describes how Cowley was taken over by the excesses of Louis Aragon and André Breton, who repudiated rationality in favor of nonsense manifestos and "significant gestures" of violence intended as a "shock treatment for a crazed humanity." Cowley's punching of the proprietor of the Rotonde in Paris is invoked by Munson as an instance of what Cowley's Dadaist principles apparently "required" him to do. But perhaps a more significant gesture of revolt against reason was the episode, at Cowley's home in Giverny, marked by a book-burning and micturating party. There Cowley was said to have burned a number of books (including perhaps a set of Racine, on whom he was writing his thesis) in a gesture of revolt against rationality and "book fetishism." Accounts of this episode vary, but Cowley was described by Harold Loeb as roaring "Too much *merde,* too much junk. Words aren't enough," while "the soft night smelled of urine and burning paper." Ah, *les jeunes.* Horace Gregory was later to ask: "What group of young Americans today would set fire to books written by their betters in an open fireplace?" He could hardly have guessed, in 1959, that within a few years whole libraries would be trashed and some, like the library at University College of New York University, would be set aflame.

It is very likely that Cowley, Loeb, and others at the book-burning party were drunk. And Cowley has minimized the incident as involving only some execrable French reviews and old textbooks. But in fact this Dadaist repudiation of the literary tradition enacted at Giverny, with Cowley speechifying, commending his books to the flames, and peeing on them, is not different

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

from that wonderful satirical scene, in Chapter Forty-one of Maugham's *Of Human Bondage* (1915), where Maugham describes the young literary radicals of the *fin de siècle* in Paris. They sound breathtakingly like Cowley and *les jeunes* of the New York literary scene in the Twenties:

> "Great art can't exist without a moral element."
>
> "Oh God!" cried Lawson furiously. "I knew it was that. He wants morality." He joined his hands and held them towards heaven in supplication. "Oh, Christopher Columbus, Christopher Columbus, what did you do when you discovered America?"
>
> "Ruskin says . . ."
>
> "Gentlemen," he said in a stern voice, and his huge nose positively wrinkled with passion, "a name has been mentioned which I never thought to hear again in decent society. Freedom of speech is all very well, but we must observe the limits of common propriety. You may talk of Bouguereau if you will; there is a cheerful disgustingness in the sound which excites laughter; but let us not sully our chaste lips with the names of J. Ruskin, G. F. Watts, or E. B. Jones."
>
> "Who was Ruskin anyway?" asked Flanagan.
>
> "He was one of the great Victorians. He was a master of English style."
>
> "Ruskin's style—a thing of shreds and purple patches," said Lawson. "Besides, damn the Great Victorians. Whenever I open a paper and see Death of a Great Victorian, I thank Heaven there's one more of them gone. Their only talent was longevity, and no artist should be allowed to live after he's forty; by then a man has done his best work, all he does after that is repetition. Don't you think it was the greatest luck in the world for them that Keats, Shelley, Bonington, and Byron died early? What a genius we should think Swinburne if he had perished on the day the first series of *Poems and Ballads* was published!"
>
> The suggestion pleased, for no one at the table was more than twenty-four, and they threw themselves upon it with gusto. They were unanimous for once. They elaborated. Someone proposed a vast bonfire made out of the works of the Forty Academicians into which the Great Victorians might be hurled on their fortieth birthday. The idea was received with acclamation. Carlyle and Ruskin, Tennyson, Browning, G. F. Watts, E. B. Jones, Dickens, Thackeray, they were hurried into the flames; Mr. Gladstone, John Bright, and Cobden; there was a moment's discussion about George Meredith, but Matthew Arnold and Emerson were given up cheerfully. At last came Walter Pater.
>
> "Not Walter Pater," murmured Philip.
>
> Lawson stared at him for a moment with his green eyes and then nodded.
>
> "You're quite right . . . ."

In the case of these youth, an exception for Pater could be made in the name of aestheticism. But whatever the Victorian past might have meant in terms of social values and moral ideas, these—insofar as they were embodied in the work of the great Victorians—counted for naught. All young artists of course commend themselves on the ground of the purity of their art. Yet one invariably finds in such instances of youthful literary radicalism little understanding of the relation between the aesthetic and the social or historical; in fact, there is an evident inclination to deny the relationship.

In "The Idea of Order at Key West," Wallace Stevens meditated on the creative process as a "rage for order," with the implication that art is constructive and constitutive of reality. And so it is. Art orders reality by ordering perception and understanding. Painting and music, literature and architecture, these and the other arts, together with those social institutions that, by their very survival, testify to their necessity for us as social beings—these make up the indispensable elements of civilization that the conservative would guard; they are values already in place, but continually in question, and the destruction of them would be an impoverishment of our lives.

But another argument could be and has been made that art is a rage for disorder, for the destruction of form, with the implica-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion that such "beautiful murderings of reality" (to use E. E. Cummings's description of Picasso's art) are necessary to destroy our encrusted perceptual habits, our tendency to passive, thoughtless, surrender to the culturally given. There is merit in this view. Whenever original genius reconstitutes our perception of reality in beautiful forms we are individually enriched; and culture in its historical configuration becomes a more valuable gift to the young coming into it. But the burden on the young of the culturally given can never justify their periodic tendency to want to destroy it; nor can the conservative wish them to have the social power to realize their aims. Was there anything exaggerated in Edith Wharton's satire, in *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929), on the Parisian radicals' wish to "break the old moulds" and "demolish the old landmarks"? As her character Lorry Spear puts it: "Who ever consulted you and me when the Pyramids were built—or Versailles? Why should we be saddled with all that old dead masonry? Ruins are what we want—more ruins!" This is merely a fictive way of saying what Aragon, Breton, Antonin Artaud, Paul Eluard and twenty-four other artistic radicals said in their "Open Letter to M. Paul Claudel, French Ambassador to Japan" (1925): "We are not concerned with creation. We fervently hope that wars and colonial insurrections will annihilate this Western civilization whose vermin you protect in the East, and we appeal to this destruction as the state of affairs least inacceptable to the mind."

This is No, in Thunder. This is cultural alienation in the extremity of its crisis, a self-loathing and a self-destructiveness that would bring down the temple of civilization on everyone else too, a death kit for what is seen as only a charnel house of horrors. The Twenties had no monopoly on Life As a Nightmare, on the desire for Apocalypse Now. Twain wanted to wipe out nineteenth-century civilization in The Battle of the Sand Belt in *A Connecticut Yankee,* Captain Ahab revenged himself by destroying the *Pequod* crew, West's *The Day of the Locust* hankered for "The Burning of Los Angeles," and Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* concludes in a nuclear catastrophe. If God repented himself for having created mankind and wished to destroy his civilization in a universal flood, we should not be surprised that novelists and critics sometimes succumb to the apocalyptic madness. It arises out of cultural disappointment, desire unfulfilled, out of the discrepancy between a personal fantasy of possible perfection and the hard, intractable order of reality, of life, which, as Emerson observed, cares little for systems and system-makers, whether they be utopian social engineers or makers of aesthetic systems.

What should be the relationship between the modern artist and his culture? In "The Fate of the Avant Garde" (*Partisan Review,* Summer 1957), Richard Chase commended the view espoused by William Phillips, who saw the avant-garde artist as a "suspended man" who "keeps the balance of opposing forces," who is situated "between tradition and revolt, nationalism and internationalism, the aesthetic and the civic, and between belonging and alienation." There is something to be said for this formulation. But this was not a position adequately allowed to the avant-garde artist by the critics of the radical Left, who demanded political alienation. Even literary radicals like Brooks and V. L. Parrington posed literary issues in terms of sociological categories, as in fact mutually exclusive extremes: liberals and reactionaries; highbrows and lowbrows; and, more recently, palefaces and redskins. The center ground in the Twenties was the joke of middlebrowism, with all the negative implications of a bourgeois conservatism ascribed to it. This middle ground was thus no ground at all for the writers of what Chase calls "the insurgent movement in this country which defended 'modernism'—that is, the aesthetic experimentalism and social protest of the period between 1912 and 1950."

The reduction, by Brooks and others, of America's rich cultural complexity and diversity to such oversimplified sociological

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

categories thus left many artists in the 1920s with nowhere to stand. Fortunately, the best artists stood for their art. How did the radical Left receive them? A good test case is the reception of *The Waste Land* and *Ulysses,* both published in 1922, both cornerstones of the modernist avant-garde. As literary editor of *The Freeman,* Van Wyck Brooks had nothing worthwhile to say about them. To have acclaimed them would have entrapped him, he understood, in a political contradiction that he—unlike the later *Partisan Review* group—could not tolerate.

But if Chase did not accurately perceive the dilemma of the experimental artist who was being told that socialist alienation was his only response to American life, he did grasp the ways in which the irreconcilable motives of insurgency in art and politics disoriented Brooks, once he came to understand them:

> Brooks abdicated from modern culture about 1925, drawing back in horror from the genie whose bottle his early polemics had helped to unstopper. For behold! among the great writers who really spoke for the present and the future were Eliot, Joyce, Proust, Gide, Hemingway, and Pound, and they all seemed to Brooks culturally dangerous—they were, he said, undemocratic, highbrow, coterie writers.

Of course it is improbable to think that Eliot, Joyce, Proust, Gide, and the rest would have been bottled up, and uncreative, had not Brooks's polemics unstoppered them. Brooks's influence was America-oriented, and essentially important to writers of the second order. The conclusion is thus inescapable that the really great artistic modernists of the Teens and Twenties managed to realize their genius by ignoring, or resolutely rejecting, the alienated insurgent politics demanded of them by the literary sociologists of the Left. In declining what "the age demanded," they sometimes appeared to be more undemocratic than, in fact, they were—the Pound of the Thirties always, of course, excepted.

But what of avant-garde writers who could not find themselves, or find that ideal middle ground within American culture that Phillips hypothesized? Here, both Hart Crane and Gorham Munson are exemplary. Close friends during Crane's best years (1919-1925), they both were wracked by the cultural incoherence of the time. It is with great sorrow that Munson recounts the story of Crane's collapse into alcoholism, compulsive homosexuality, artistic paralysis, and eventual suicide. Crane is held forth to us as an instance of the cost to genius of the intellectual deracination and spiritual alienation so pervasive in the Twenties.

Munson himself, as we have seen, did not fare too well in the period up to about 1924, for the demand upon him, as well as upon others, to be insurgent in socio-political thought as well as in art immersed him in such a welter of competing political, social, and literary movements that, without a principle with which to interrogate the concept of insurgency itself, he was at sea. In reaction to Brooks's tendency to reduce literature to an instrument of class analysis and social change, Munson eventually came to call for a deeper aesthetic understanding which would see the work of art in its own right, and not as a datum of "sociological criticism." In his *Dial* essay of January 1925, "Van Wyck Brooks," Munson's pre-New Criticism search for a ground upon which the work of art could regain an intrinsic aesthetic autonomy is evident. This search became more obvious in his book on Frost, which commended such principles as restraint, order, and the "law of decorum or measure or proportion." Such a view smacked of the New Humanism, which had tried to reintroduce the faculty of reason into these issues; but with this, of course, radical insurgency could have no traffic.

Yet it would be a mistake to keep the focus on these literary matters. For the dominant intent of *The Awakening Twenties* is not to offer a private correction of our literary history in aesthetic terms. When we ask how Munson escaped the chaos of rootless insurgent intellectualism in his time, the an-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

swer does not lie in a more precise understanding of the character of art or its social function. Munson escaped, it must be immediately said, through spiritualism. Introduced to P.D. Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum* by Hart Crane and thence to the bizarre mysticism of G.I. Gurdjieff and his English apostle A.R. Orage, Munson surrendered himself to the esoteric regimen by which, his masters alleged, one could ascend to the highest level of cosmic consciousness. This does not get us much beyond Whitman and his disciple Richard Maurice Bucke, and is of a piece with it. But Gurdjieff claimed to have rediscovered the technique, lost in antiquity, by which the Egyptians, Buddhists, Pythagoreans, and Gnostics attained unto "The Fourth Way." In private meetings in New York salons and at Gurdjieff's Château du Prieuré, where Gurdjieff had founded his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man, Munson and his wife submitted themselves to the discipline, which involved sacred gymnastics or exotic dancing, the repression or denial of the ego, and humiliating manual labor (like breaking up stones on the guru's estate), all intended to produce the new illumination.

Gurdjieff was a quack and a charlatan or a spiritual genius, depending on one's point of view. For Waldo Frank, who went to Prieuré seeking the Light, Gurdjieff was a devil; Munson thought otherwise, and there is no use quarreling with him. What seems evident is that in the intellectual, social, and moral disorder of the Twenties—in what Crane called "the spiritual disintegration of the period"—rootless artists and intellectuals were predisposed to search for absolutist remedies that conferred, at least for a while, some meaning on life. Some took the route of political radicalism. Others found it in Theosophy, Anthroposophy, Coué-ism, or Moral Rearmament, in the Society for Psychical Research, Freudianism, Anglo-Catholicism and Royalism, in Aimee Semple McPhersonism, in the esoteric doctrines of highly touted swamis, and in the California nut cults that Nathanael West satirized in *Miss Lonelyhearts*.

Something of the ridiculous side of Twenties spiritualism is inadvertently revealed in Munson's fond descriptions of the meetings of the Orage group in New York City —at Muriel Draper's, Rosetta O'Neill's, and Margaret Anderson's—where Gurdjieff's mysticism was commended to what Munson calls the *intelligentsia,* "the public that in 1924 read the *Dial* and the *New Republic* and *Vanity Fair,* listened to Stravinsky and Schoenberg, looked at Picasso and Matisse, discussed psychoanalysis and the progressive education of John Dewey, and inclined toward socialism." If this was the pastime of the intelligentsia, it sounds suspiciously like the *soirées* that enchanted Carol Kennicott in Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street.* But as Mencken remarked, Lewis's identification of this with culture was bogus. Yet we find in Munson's account the record of those who came to Orage's presentations—some to scoff, some to pray: Brooks, Padraic Colum, Edna Kenton, Mable Dodge Luhan, Boardman Robinson, T.S. Matthews, Herbert Croly, Melville Cane, Jean Toomer, Hart Crane, Margaret Naumberg, Frank and Helen Westley. Toomer, like Katherine Mansfield, seems to have been a total convert, but Crane was turned off by those who had "rushed into the portals of the famous Gurdjieff institute and have put themselves through all sorts of Hindu antics, songs, dances, incantations, psychic sessions, etc."

Munson's conversion in 1924 to the Ouspensky-Gurdjieff work of spiritual self-development may have brought him serenity, even cosmic consciousness, although Munson is modest about this. But it was not a good preparation for writing a personal memoir, much less a literary history of those turbulent years. For the resultant prose is flat and affectless. It lacks personality: after all, Gurdjieff had taught his disciples to regard themselves as "non-entities." Hence, Munson found it "very difficult," in writing this book so many years later, "to feel oneself back in 1921." Not even the hijacking of his magazine *Secession* by Malcolm Cowley and John Brooks Wheelwright provokes much more indignation than "Ah, yewth,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

yewth! We fledgling writers were more adept in sizing up books than in sizing up people." And his account of his fistfight with Matthew Josephson—whom he had called an intellectual faker before the assembled American Dadaists in a Prince Street speakeasy—is downplayed as mere boyish high spirits.

That time may soften old enmities and reconcile literary antagonists, especially if one has been converted to the Higher Way, is perhaps understandable. But what does not ring true to the biographical record is Munson's account of the decline of the poet in "The Untold Story of Hart Crane." Stripped to its essentials, Munson argues here that Crane was well on his way to a true understanding of Ouspensky's view that "Art in its highest manifestation is a path to cosmic consciousness." But when Orage came to America to elaborate on Ouspenskyian-Gurdjieffian mysticism, Crane was unwilling to submit himself to the discipline of the "C" influence, which is "exercised only by direct contact of master with disciple." Crane recoiled from Gurdjieff, "as though shocked by a high-voltage current," in consequence of which his "magnetic center" dissolved, he became creatively paralyzed, failed to finish *The Bridge,* and presumably was fated for suicide. One would have to be one of the mystic's disciples to accept this reading of Crane's tragic decline, which in fact expressed a poignant instability of self lacking, in that chaotic time, the support that a coherent culture may provide.

What necessary effect, if any, does an imperative of political insurgency have upon a literary avant-garde moved by idealistic social longings? In the case of Munson's *les jeunes,* we can see that the legacy of Bourne and Brooks was a legacy of cultural criticism on a wobbly base, with the effect that, along with other forces, it served to unsettle their politics, to subvert, at least implicitly, the principles of constitutional democracy as envisioned by the Founding Fathers, and to render somehow plausible the more explicit and chilling Communist Party agenda of the 1930s. If Munson escaped into spiritualism and sacred gymnastics, something of the same moral history can be seen in some of the insurgent youth of the 1960s who were swept up into New Left radicalism, fomented social disorder, got a good look into the Abyss, became disillusioned, withdrew to Tibet, submitted to one or another popular guru, worshipped one or another Rock group, wrote Wichita Vortex Sutras, or took up the saffron robes and tambourines of the Hari Krishnas. Such avenues of escape from the alienation of self in a time of social disorder are a perennial fact of American cultural experience. They are of a piece with the Millerites withdrawing in white sheets, on October 22, 1844, to await the Second Coming. But most of us are fated to live in the real world, the world of work and love, of getting and spending, of thinking and feeling, and of integrating our experience into a sense of the continuity of our culture, aware of the finitude of our private being.

In such a world the vitality of particular works of art and the utility of the critical tradition must invariably engage the mind. In respect to criticism, we note that Clayton calls Bourne a "forgotten prophet," and it may be true that he is of value only when war seems imminent. Perhaps Clayton is also right in remarking that "Only historians and a few older professors of English take Brooks seriously today." Clearly the best art of the period from 1915-1930 was not amenable to the sociological reductions of critics like Brooks and Bourne. Eliot, Pound, Frost, Hemingway, Faulkner, and Stevens—as instances of literary modernism—created works of art that still claim our attention. Their continuing command upon us is inextricably connected to their rejection of a pragmatic or functionalist view of art as the instrument of social change. This does not mean that they are without social effect, for they transformed consciousness then and they still do today.

We need the kind of imaginative experimentalism, the kind of *literary* radicalism their work represents. For the reconstitution of aesthetic forms is by no means unassimil-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

able with the conservation of worthwhile values in American culture. Much of aesthetic experimentalism may lead down blind alleys toward dead ends. But we can never predict what elements of form, sedimented in our culture or lost to feeling in a neglected work from the past, will somehow be revitalized and renovated, suddenly foregrounded in a new work of genius. Culture is immediately enriched by the recognition of such works. Human perception is clarified, taste is corrected, unseen intellectual relations are discovered, and standards of judgment are more nearly perfected. And the relation of these matters to the regulative and normative conditions of our public being, as a democratic society under the rule of a law hospitable to individual genius, is made plain to consciousness. When we think about *The Waste Land,* the *Cantos, The Sound and the Fury,* and like works, they bring into focus questions about taste and judgment, politics and culture, tradition and the individual talent, in a way that the works of Floyd Dell and Waldo Frank, of Max Eastman and Upton Sinclair, of Sinclair Lewis and Mike Gold—the stalwarts of literary radicalism—can never do.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Motherwell retrospective
by Roger Kimball

The Motherwell retrospective exhibition that came to the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum this winter[1] was the artist's first major retrospective in the United States since 1965, when the Museum of Modern Art mounted a retrospective that was organized by the poet Frank O'Hara, then associate curator at the museum. The recently closed exhibition included many works from the late Sixties and Seventies—an especially productive period for Motherwell—and, notwithstanding a few lamentable omissions, it provided viewers with a rich and judicious selection from the artist's *oeuvre* from the early Forties to the present. Coinciding with Motherwell's seventieth birthday, in January, the exhibition was also an invitation to reconsider Motherwell's long and distinguished career and to reflect on his artistic achievement and role as a charter member of the phenomenon we have come to call Abstract Expressionism.

As if to aid in this task, the Guggenheim supplemented the ninety-two paintings and collages of the original exhibition with about sixty additional works, including drawings and a few prints. Many of these small, mostly minor, productions adorned the back wall of the Museum's High Gallery. But despite the concentration of some forty pieces on one wall, the overall effect, far from being cramped, was one of delightful profusion and vivacity. Indeed, this installation was one of the exhibition's most successful moments.

Complications elsewhere were mostly a matter of logistics. For one thing, the nearly one hundred and fifty works on display seemed to be arranged more or less thematically, without particular regard for chronology. Since it is in the nature of a retrospective to encourage us to look back over its subject's development, this made for some confusion. The natural impulse to trace Motherwell's journey from the early paintings and collages through the *Elegies* to the *Open* series and other late works was frequently stymied.

Nor was one's appreciation of Motherwell enhanced by Frank Lloyd Wright's polemic against modern painting—the Museum itself. Of course, this is by now a familiar complaint. The Guggenheim has been the object of vigorous criticism almost since it opened its doors. But the Motherwell retrospective once again reminded us of how singularly inhospitable the Museum's main exhibition space is as an arena for looking at art. (Its suitability as a space for looking

1 *Robert Motherwell* had its debut at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, in October, 1983. The show was organized by Douglas G. Schultz, chief curator of the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, under the direction of Robert T. Buck, former director of the gallery. After Buffalo, the show travelled to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Washington, and New York. The exhibition was on view at the Guggenheim from December 7 through February 3.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

at people looking at art is quite another matter; it is here, perhaps, that its real virtues as a public space emerge.) Vertigo is a constant danger if one gets too close to the railing on the higher stories—close enough, say, to view larger canvases—and the steep grade of the spiraling floor provokes the unpleasant sensation of being dragged down along a predetermined itinerary. Further, the curved walls of the exhibition bays tend to make large canvases appear slightly concave—a distinct liability when one is confronting works that aim, as many of Motherwell's do, at uncompromising flatness.

Any retrospective of an artist as prolific as Motherwell has to leave out a good deal. In this show, I particularly missed any examples of *Beside the Sea,* a lyrical series in oil on heavy rag paper done mostly in the early Sixties. But perhaps the most significant omissions were of the early collage, *Pancho Villa Dead and Alive* (1943), and the powerful 1949 oil and tempera painting, *The Voyage.*

Pancho Villa Dead and Alive, a dramatic tribute to the Mexican folk hero, is one of Motherwell's most often noted early collages. Exhibited in his first one-man show at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery in 1944, it has a special historical importance in any overview of his artistic development. And *The Voyage* is one of Motherwell's five or six most celebrated paintings. It can stand as a statement in paint of his modernist artistic credo. The title, as Motherwell has noted, was inspired by Baudelaire's poem *Le Voyage,* and the painting successfully communicates that passion for the new, the new at any cost, that the young painter found so enticing in Baudelaire's paean to the Unknown:

> Nous voulons . . .
> Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer ou Ciel, qu'importe?
> Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver de *nouveau*![2]

2 "We would . . ./Plunge to the bottom of the abyss —Hell or Heaven, what matter?/If only we find in the depths of the Unknown the *new*!"

The two works are illustrated in the exhibition catalogue, but their absence from the show was unfortunate—and, one would like to think, unnecessary, since they both reside nearby at the Museum of Modern Art.

In general, though, Messrs. Schultz and Buck—together with Diane Waldman, who installed the show at the Guggenheim—succeeded admirably in representing Motherwell's activity as a painter and collagist. (With a few significant exceptions—the pieces assembled in the High Gallery being the most notable—his drawings and prints were left largely out of account.) Among early works, *The Little Spanish Prison* (1941) —generally considered his first mature painting—was included, as were the energetic 1943 works *Joy of Living* and *Personage.* Motherwell's handling of forms in the latter two reveal obvious debts to Picasso's synthetic Cubism and to the late work of Klee and Kandinsky. But by the time he paints *The Homely Protestant (Bust)* (c. 1947-8) and *The Homely Protestant* (1948) Motherwell has assimilated these influences and the more recent influence of Dubuffet (whose paintings he could have seen at the Pierre Matisse Gallery in 1946) into a style more decidedly his own. In fact, there is a great deal about these witty ochre "portraits" that bears the stamp of Motherwell's sensibility —not least the genesis of the wonderfully apt title, which he arrived at by opening *Finnegan's Wake* and placing his finger at random on the phrase.

Motherwell is often credited with reinvigorating, and refining, the art of the collage. His abiding interest in the medium dates from 1943, when Peggy Guggenheim invited him, Jackson Pollock, and William Baziotes to submit collages for an exhibition that she was planning at her gallery. The prospect was especially exciting for the young artists since the exhibition was to include works by Picasso, Braque, Miró, Matisse, and other European masters. Motherwell worked on his first collages—including *Pancho Villa Dead and Alive*—together with Jackson Pollock in Pollock's better-equipped studio. The retrospective testified to the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

considerable range of Motherwell's experiments in this pliable genre, from the turbulent business of *Joy of Living* to the whispering intensities of *Mallarmé's Swan* (1944-47), from the slick elegance of something like *The French Line* (1960) to the spare but calculated juxtapositions of *Black Refracts Heat* (1974).

As a group, Motherwell's collages are probably the most immediately charming and accessible of his works. Some, like *Mallarmé's Swan,* exhibit a striking concentration and energy. This work in particular is possessed of a beautifully poised strength and delicacy that make it a classic of the period. But many—and *The French Line* and Motherwell's well-known essays with the Gauloise cigarette wrapper must be included here—seem more purely decorative: still charming, yes, but lacking precisely that edge of feeling that can lift a work above the *merely* charming and decorative. Some of Motherwell's leaner but conceptually more ambitious efforts—*Black Refracts Heat,* for instance, or *Black Sounds* (1982-83)—elicit a more complicated reaction. Here one's response tends to oscillate uncomfortably between extremes, between the feeling that they are exquisitely composed and effective and, alternately, the conviction that they are at bottom contrived, rote performances.

In his essay for the catalogue of the 1965 retrospective of Motherwell's works at the Museum of Modern Art, Frank O'Hara observed that in Motherwell "the family of forms is a relatively small one and the plastic handling of them carries the burden of intention." In this context it is worth noting that Motherwell has often been charged with being unduly repetitive. His penchant for working out variations of a visual motif in a series of paintings gives at least *prima facie* support to this charge. There are, for example, more than one hundred and forty paintings in the *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* series, more than two hundred in the *Open* series.

What is the effect of such sustained repetition on our response to Motherwell's work? He has written that "painting that does not radiate feeling is not worth looking at." Can the requisite feeling survive one hundred and forty or two hundred variations? There is no denying that there are often great similarities among paintings in a series—one *Elegy* can look *very* much like another. And it may be that Motherwell is too willing to "publish" works that are not fully achieved, or that are merely studies on the way toward something new, or that really are essentially repetitions of an already articulated theme.

But it must also be granted that there are often significant differences among the paintings in a series, differences in tone, manner, and use of materials as well as more obvious inconographic differences. Still, O'Hara was right: Motherwell tends to focus on exploring a small body of forms. His approach is more intensive than extensive—more an art of elaboration than invention, to put it another way, though it is well to remember that elaboration sufficiently developed is itself a kind of invention.

Furthermore, none of this should be taken to deny the liveliness of Motherwell's pictorial vocabulary. The early works and many of the collages display a freer, more fanciful exploration of visual forms than do the major "series" paintings, which grapple in a sustained way with the visual and emotional possibilities of a deliberately circumscribed set of forms. In fact, when we step back from individual pieces to consider Motherwell's work as a whole, we can discern a division or vacillation at the heart of his artistic ambitions. On the one hand, Motherwell produces works of great intimacy and seductiveness, works whose surfaces celebrate the aesthetic richness of visual experience. But he has also consistently aimed at producing sterner, more monumental works whose innate artistic significance would exempt them from the obligation to be merely "pleasing." Just how successful he has been in the latter is a question worth considering. At the moment, I want only to emphasize that much of Motherwell's work—some of his less numerous series paintings, for example—are decidedly more "extensive" than "intensive," more fanciful, inventive, and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spontaneous in their exploration of visual forms than the major series paintings tend to be.

In this context, one thinks of the sumptuous *Summertime in Italy* series or, especially, of the *Je t'aime* series, of which there were two paintings and two drawings in the show. Begun in 1955, the *Je t'aime* paintings generally consist of a ground mostly of reds or browns and reds upon which the words "Je t'aime" (and occasionally a few other French words) appear in varying degrees of legibility. The highly gestural quality of Motherwell's brushwork is dramatically evident in these works, often as much in the "calligraphy" as in the ground, and they can be pleasingly evocative.

In what is pretty much the standard work on Motherwell,[3] H. H. Arnason, writing about the *Je t'aime* paintings, notes the artist's longstanding interest in the interaction of word and image. Arnason is not very specific about the significance of that interaction, though no doubt Motherwell himself would resist being too exact on that point, fearing to sacrifice evocativeness to specificity. Yet the presence of the familiar phrase does color one's response to these paintings. Intelligible words of any sort in a painting will obviously be read and influence interpretation, even if the question of just how we are to read such words—naïvely? ironically? humorously?—and how that reading is to influence our interpretation of the work must be left somewhat in abeyance. In the present case, one naturally wonders to whom—or to what—the phrase is addressed. Motherwell's lifelong love affair with French culture suggests that the phrase may token his affection for that rich source of inspiration, while the playful abandon that characterizes the surface of the works—the words "Ce dessin me plaît" appear scrawled across the bottom of one of the drawings—suggests that the object of Motherwell's love here may have been the very activity of making art.

For his part, Arnason suggests that Motherwell uses a French phrase primarily in order to avoid the sentimental and clichéd associations that an American viewer would have to its English equivalent.

> While the admixture of word and image always seems to have fascinated him, Motherwell was sensitive to the danger of deadened associations that might arise from an English cliché incorporated into a painting or collage. It was for this reason in the *Je t'aime* paintings that he turned to French, which no doubt is a cliché in French, but not to an American, for whom another language is sufficiently exotic that the verbal significance of a phrase would distance him. At the same time *"Je t'aime"* did have to him a personal and poignant meaning, although perhaps not literally.

Arnason may be correct that Americans tend to find French "exotic." But I wonder what percentage of Motherwell's audience finds a phrase like "Je t'aime" exotic. Would "I love you" have been any more banal? Perhaps. But one can't help noticing that what is really exotic here is Arnason's manipulation of English syntax, which manages to suggest that French is a cliché to itself—a suggestion that the French are likely to take exception to.

In any case, the essential truth of O'Hara's observation about the relative paucity of forms in Motherwell's art becomes apparent as soon as we turn to his two best-known sets of paintings, the *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* series and the *Open* series. Both were lavishly represented in the Guggenheim show. Though there are many, often substantial, variations among the individual paintings, the *Opens* generally consist of a large field of color intersected at the top by three lines that form a hard-edged "U" or (counting the edge of the canvas as a line) a rectangle. Motherwell often adds a contrasting color and some drawing to the plane formed by the rectangle. The series is said to have had its origin in 1967 in a chance observation. Intrigued by the shape that a smaller canvas formed lying up against a

3 *Robert Motherwell,* Abrams, 1977. Revised edition, 1982.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

larger one, Motherwell traced the outline onto the larger canvas, thus forming an upside-down "U." Eventually, he came to prefer the design the other way around, so he inverted the canvas so that the "U" opened upward.

Motherwell has noted that he was inspired to name the resulting series of paintings "Open" by the evocative list of eighty-two entries that the *Random House Unabridged Dicitonary* furnishes for the word. "For me," he explains in some remarks on his work included in Arnason's book, "those entries are one of the most beautiful poems in modern English, filled with all kinds of associations." And some of the best *Opens*—visually tight, concentrated, yet splendidly suggestive—are similarly replete with associations, the drawn rectangle attracting our attention like a beckoning window. There are, however, a great many of them, some considerably more successful than others, and seeing more than a few at one time can mute their effect and make them seem drearily formulaic.

It is often observed that with the *Open* series, Motherwell begins to move away from the highly gestural quality that characterizes his work through the early Sixties toward Color-field painting. There is obviously something right about this. But Irving Sandler is probably closer to the truth when he speaks, in *The Triumph of American Painting,*[4] of Motherwell "fusing" gestural and Color-field tendencies. Motherwell's dynamic brushwork continually enlivens and complicates even his flattest, most monochromatic paintings, often enlisting color itself as a kind of gesture. And the influence of Minimalism on the simplification of Motherwell's pictorial means in the *Opens* is also patent and perhaps even more significant. Coming into its own in the 1960s, Minimalism's rigorous, almost ascetic, program of "essentializing" art gave new impetus to Motherwell's own abiding interest in distilling his visual forms in order to explore their purest, most expressive elements.

The fruits of this process of distillation are also evident in other recent works. The *In Plato's Cave* series, for example, bears witness to the expressive possibilities of Motherwell's experiments with variations on the *Opens*. I found *In Plato's Cave No. 1* (1972) a particularly successful work. In many respects, the grisaille study preserves the iconography of the *Opens*. It, too, presents a plane intersected by orthogonals in the shape of an incomplete "U." But its heavily modulated surface—full of black and smokey greys and ashen, ghostlike whites—suggests unfathomable depths. In places, the coarse, nubby texture of the canvas shows through clearly; in other places it is almost totally obscured by layers of paint. One begins to feel as if one really were staring into Plato's cave, or its painterly simulacrum: into a realm of shadows where mere semblances parade by trapped but unsuspecting viewers who are fated to misconstrue the images they see for realities. Though clearly indebted to the *Opens,* this powerful work communicates a markedly different, and more mysterious, emotion.

Of course the paintings that we most readily associate with Motherwell are his *Spanish Elegies.* Motherwell first created the image of heavy black bars squeezing black ovoids on a white ground in 1948 in an illustration for a poem by Harold Rosenberg. The small *At Five in the Afternoon* (1949), after a poem by Federico García Lorca, is a completed *Elegy* in miniature. But he did not begin using the generic name *Elegy to the Spanish Republic* until the Fifties. His best-known *Elegies*—No. 34, for example, which was in the show—are large canvases done mostly in black and white but highlighted with splashes of bright color.

It is Motherwell's dramatic use of black—indebted, as has been often noted, to Goya, Matisse, and Picasso's *Guernica*—that brings to life and gives pathos to the memorable image that forms the core of the *Elegies.* Like de Kooning, Still, Kline, and other New York School painters, Motherwell found a new reservoir of expressive possibilities in

4 *The Triumph of American Painting: A History of Abstract Expressionism.* Praeger, 1970.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the stark polarity of black against white, possibilities that helped free painting from its conventional "artsy" associations with "pretty" or "prettifying" colors. Indeed, exploitation of the expressive possibilities of black and white—not only in the *Elegies* but also in works like *The Voyage* and (less successfully) *Spanish Painting with the Face of a Dog* (1958), as well as in numerous all-black-and-white paintings—has been one of Motherwell's central artistic concerns.

The *Elegies* as such no longer seem to occupy a central place in Motherwell's work. Despite their ostensible political reference, he has written that the *Elegies* "are not 'political,' but my private insistence that a terrible death has happened that should not be forgot." And after the death of Franco and the establishment of democracy in Spain, elegizing the republic may not be the best way to offer, as Motherwell claims to have intended with the *Elegies,* "general metaphors of the contrast between life and death, and their interrelation." There is, nevertheless, a marked persistence of elegy-like images in Motherwell's later work. In *The Hollow Men* (1983), for example, brooding purples war with brilliant, textured yellows that are cut into ovoids by a parade of jittery drawing. Anything by Motherwell that includes such ovoid shapes will recall the *Elegies,* of course, and it is easy to see the impact of the *Elegies* on *The Hollow Men.* One may wonder how well this image—by now so bound up for us with Franco's Spain—can work apart from its original connotations. But even more noteworthy is how much of an emotional departure from the *Elegies* the recent work is, how Motherwell's use of color and drawing here infuse the familiar elegy form with a decidedly "unelegiac" feeling. *The Hollow Men* may, in fact, represent a new step in Motherwell's artistic evolution.

The retrospective at the Guggenheim provided the basic visual materials to trace the course of that evolution; what remains is to assess its artistic achievement. This is a considerably more difficult task. One problem that must be overcome in attempting it is that much of the recent literature on Motherwell is essentially an exercise in hagiography, not art criticism. Arnason, for example, pauses to tell us that "It has been suggested that of all living artists, Motherwell, in the range of his work, the breadth of his knowledge, and the passion of his expression, most closely approximates the concept of a Renaissance man." And Jack D. Flam concludes his essay for the exhibition catalogue by celebrating Motherwell "the puritan and the sensualist, the social being and the recluse, the thinker and the force of nature." "And how much culture is evident in those works," purrs Mr. Flam, "How many references—both overt and recondite—are woven into his paintings and drawings; references to myth and poetry, to politics and history, to philosophy and to other art." *Mirabile dictu!* It is hard to know what to make of such effusions—which are not, alas, uncommon in the Motherwell industry—but they can hardly be said to inspire confidence in the author's critical independence.

Nor do Arnason's more particular judgments strike one as particularly well considered. "Many of the *Elegies,*" he writes, "are among the most important paintings of the twentieth century." Now what can this mean? How many "most important paintings of the twentieth century" can there be? Five? Ten? Twenty-five? At their best, the *Elegies*—No. 34, for instance, or the starker No. LV (1955-60)—are well-painted, moving works of art. But are even the best of them as important, historically or artistically, as *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*? Matisse's *Dance*? Miró's *The Birth of the World*? Pollock's *Lavender Mist*? Or as any of the score of other works that come to mind when one reviews the signal achievements of twentieth-century painting? Unfortunately, the Guggenheim retrospective failed to persuade us that this is the case.

What is particularly damaging about such inflationary claims is that they tend to distract one from Motherwell's considerable artistic achievements. Especially because one gets the sense that they are written, as it were, from inside the Motherwell camp, they do not increase our esteem for the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

artist's accomplishments but only make us suspicious of a conspiracy being waged on the artist's behalf.

One would like to be able to say that the exhibition catalogue provides a more circumspect response to Motherwell's work. Unfortunately, though, the fulsome tributes provided by Robert T. Buck, Jack Flam, and Dore Ashton mostly echo Arnason's homage.[5] I have already mentioned Mr. Flam's essay. It would be cruel to dwell on it or the other contributions to the catalogue in any detail; Mr. Buck's introduction is practically subliterate, and Miss Ashton's essay, like Mr. Flam's, merely rehearses the received pieties of the Motherwell legend. But since the catalogue will stand as the lasting record of the exhibition, a word or two must be said about its success in conveying an accurate impression of Motherwell's work.

In his now-classic study of Titian, Erwin Panofsky chose to illustrate his text with black and white photographs. He decided against color plates, he explains, not *in spite of* Titian's greatness as a colorist, but *because of* it. In his view, even the best color photographs would only misrepresent the subtleties of the master's palette. Panofsky's scruple can, of course, be generalized. Photographs of art can easily mislead us about not only the color but also the scale, texture, and "feel" of the original. But color photographs do have a legitimate illustrative role to play in the documentation of art, and by now—technical capabilities being what they are—one expects them to maintain a reasonably high degree of fidelity to the original.

This is especially important in photographing works of an artist like Motherwell, for whom color is sometimes a central concern. When he paints something blue, a photograph should represent it as blue, not purple; and if he uses lemon yellow, it should not come out looking like mustard. Unfortunately, this is precisely what happens in the catalogue. The photographs are by several hands, and many if not most of them grossly misrepresent Motherwell's color. The frontispiece, for example, is a color plate of *Elegy to the Spanish Republic No. 34*; and not only does the photograph conspicuously lack vibrancy and brightness, but the vivid blocks of blue that appear in the original are adamantly purple in the photograph. And *The Little Spanish Prison,* predominantly chalky white and yellow in the original, is a study in beige and mustard in the catalogue.

Of course no one expects photographs to measure up to the original. But it is worth noting William Seitz's observation that, because of their tonal quality, Motherwell's paintings, "photograph well."[6] I suspect that the coloristic subtleties of some of his later canvases—the modulated wash of blues in *The Blue Painting Lesson* series (1973), for example—would provide the photographer with more of a challenge. But the often excellent color reproductions in Arnason's book support Seitz's claim and make one wish that more care had been taken with the catalogue for the exhibition.

A great deal is made, in the literature on Motherwell, of the artist's articulateness and high degree of culture—his "extraordinary skills," as Mr. Buck put it in his introduction, "as a writer and editor." These skills have made him, according to Mr. Buck, "the unofficial American spokesman for his artistic times." Motherwell's interest in nineteenth- and twentieth-century French writers like Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé, and Breton is especially touted in this context,

5 *Robert Motherwell,* with an introduction by Robert T. Buck and essays by Jack D. Flam and Dore Ashton. Abbeville Press, 156 pages, $35.

6 Despite some omissions that seem odd with the wisdom of hindsight, Seitz's pioneering 1955 study, *Abstract Expressionist Painting in America,* is still one of the most rigorous and thoughtful investigations of the subject. Originally his Ph.D. dissertation for Princeton University, it was first published in book form by Harvard University Press in 1983. As published, incidentally, the book contains a foreword by Motherwell and an introduction by Dore Ashton.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

as is his background in philosophy (Motherwell took his A.B. at Stanford in philosophy and did graduate work in philosophy at Harvard in 1937-38).

In fact, the quality of Motherwell's writings varies greatly, in style and substance, from the limpidly astute to the barely readable. In addition to various statements he has issued over the years about his art, Motherwell's most important literary productions include *The Documents of Modern Art* series, which he began editing in 1944, *Modern Artists in America,* which he edited with Ad Reinhardt in 1951, *The Documents of 20th-Century Art,* and—perhaps his most important contribution to art scholarship—*The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology,* which he edited and wrote a preface and introduction for in 1951. Examination of his writings is, of course, a subject for another essay. But Motherwell's literary and philosophical interests do not show themselves only in his writings; they also impinge directly on his activity as an artist, helping to inform his methods and to articulate his artistic goals. In order to appreciate his distinctive achievement, then, it is necessary to give at least brief consideration to the constellation of ideas that his artistic practice as an Abstract Expressionist painter presupposes.

Like other Abstract Expressionists, Motherwell has acknowledged—indeed, he has insisted on—the importance of chance and raw, unedited impulse in his approach to making art. In the foreword he recently contributed to *Abstract Expressionist Painting in America,* he approvingly quotes Seitz's précis of the "method" of Abstract Expressionism.

> [T]he spirit in which the extreme Abstract Expressionist painting is begun can be summarized thus: shapes, colors, and lines are placed on the canvas with the least possible premeditation, their initial form and juxtaposition dictated by various levels of the sub-, un-, or semi-consciousness—by unplanned inspirations, by sheer fortuity, or by the inherent nature of the medium. Here is a disorganized but vital complex of raw formal data—an uncoordinated "unknown," a Heraclitean flux which the painter during subsequent phases of the process relates, alters, and organizes on the basis of a mediating set of attitudes and principles which runs throughout his works, and even throughout his life.

Motherwell has described his own procedure in similar terms: "I begin a painting with a series of mistakes," he explained in the catalogue accompanying an exhibition at the Samuel Kootz Gallery in 1947. "The painting comes out of the correction of mistakes by feeling . . . . The final picture is the process arrested at the moment when what I was looking for flashes into view."

The major historical source of this commitment to fortuity and feeling, as Motherwell has often pointed out, is the Surrealist principle of "psychic automatism." Motherwell arrived in New York in 1939 and became acquainted with the heady idea when, a year later, Meyer Schapiro introduced him to Breton, Ernst, Duchamp, Matta, and other émigré artists who championed chance and automatism. Motherwell has described automatism—or, as he has come to call it, "artistic scribbling"—as the "core" of Abstract Expressionism, as its distinctively modernist answer to an artistic tradition at the end of its tether. No matter that this celebration of chance exposed the artist to the chance of failure on a hitherto undreamt of scale: in periods of artistic stagnation—and to the Abstract Expressionists, American painting in the late Thirties epitomized artistic stagnation—the motto is "Risk all or gain nothing." At such times, risk-taking seems to be part of the essence of art, necessary if art is to be anything more than mere decoration.

But where the spirit of risk-taking in Surrealism was primarily negative—a form of rebellion that asserted the transcendence of human freedom in the face of an essentially absurd reality—the risk-taking spirit of Abstract Expressionism sought to recover the lost or hidden meaning of reality through a deliberate exploitation of spontaneity and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

feeling. As Motherwell put it, in rejecting "the world of objects, the world of power and propaganda, the world of anecdotes," and so forth, abstract art does not exile itself from reality but delves deeper into it. Thus he can describe abstract art as a "form of mysticism," a process "in which *one's own being is revealed,* willingly or not, *which is precisely originality,* that burden of modernist individualism." In this sense, despite the determinative, European influence of Dada and Surrealism, there is something distinctively American, even Emersonian, about the optimistic ambitions of Abstract Expressionism. "What is the aboriginal Self," asked Emerson in "Self Reliance,"

> on what universal reliance may it be grounded? What is the nature and power of that science-baffling star, without parallax, without calculable elements, which shoots a ray of beauty even into trivial and impure actions, if the least mark of independence appear? The inquiry leads us to that source, at once the essence of genius, of virtue, and of life, which we call Spontaneity or Instinct.

For the Abstract Expressionists, as Clement Greenberg observed in his classic 1955 essay, "'American-Type' Painting," "conventions are overhauled, not for revolutionary effect, but in order to maintain the irreplacibility and renew the vitality of art in the face of a society bent in principle on rationalizing everything." By loosening the shackles of outworn artistic conventions, automatism promised the means to free painting from the edifying and narrowly realistic productions sponsored by the Federal Art Project and the WPA; it promised a new creative principle; it promised, above all, a means of tapping the deeper, more personal, subjectively more authentic stratum of feeling and experience that any art worth practicing must concern itself with.

But almost from the moment that he decided to devote himself to painting, in 1941, Motherwell has been something of an anomaly. Unlike some Abstract Expressionists—Jackson Pollock is only the most obvious example—Motherwell does not really *submit* to automatism; he invokes it, reflectively, and makes deliberate use of it. And unlike others—Ad Reinhardt, for example, in whose art ratiocination was absolutely central—Motherwell depends upon but is reluctant to acknowledge the intellectual, reflective dimension of his art. His painting "radiates feeling," to be sure, as he insists all good painting must, but it is feeling filtered, checked, and criticized.

Early on, in fact, Motherwell seems to have recognized this. As he put it in conversation to William Seitz, "I cover the battleground, so no evidence of the battle remains. For the other Abstract Expressionists it must show strongly." This would appear to have been evident from the beginning of Motherwell's career. Already in 1951, Thomas B. Hess observed that "Motherwell has stressed the automatic element in his methods, but he seems to depend more on a process of judicious recognition." The final effect, wrote Hess, was of "luxurious good taste."[7] And in 1955 Seitz noted, apropos Motherwell's use of automatism, that his "civilized restraint, intellectuality, and keen sense of tangible materiality—all perhaps more automatic to him than abandon—never let him give fluidity and fortuity full play."

Eventually, however, Motherwell revised his opinion and began to downplay the element of cultivation in his work and to stress the presence of untamed feeling. In an open letter to Frank O'Hara in 1965, for example, he speaks of regretting having referred so much to the French "because it gives the impression of something a bit precious and overcultivated." And one is not surprised to discover that many critics have rallied to corroborate Motherwell's new self-interpretation. For example, in her essay for the exhibition catalogue, Dore Ashton tells us that "No matter how lighthearted some of Motherwell's incidental work has been, it has always veered, becoming an expressive

---

7 *Abstract Painting: Background and American Phase.* Viking, 1951.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tide that sometimes overflows its boundaries." And the dependable Arnason writes that "Despite the high degree of sophistication evident in Motherwell's works, the overriding effect of many of them is that of primitive force, something atavistic in the most highly urbanized of modern man" *(sic)*.

But in fact, Motherwell's real genius is not at all for unrestrained visual dynamism. Despite his rhetoric, there is really very little of his hero Rimbaud's *dérèglement de tous les sens* in Motherwell's art. Quite the contrary, one consistently senses that the risks have been calculated beforehand, the chances carefully weighed. Indeed, the truth is that his art often *does* give one the impression of something a "bit precious and overcultivated." However "automatically" produced it may be, it strikes one as essentially circumspect, urbane, reflective.

In her preface to the second edition of Arnason's book, Miss Ashton speaks of Motherwell's "need to infuse his work with meaning." But here, I think, she may have spoken truer than she purposed. For the kind of primitive, almost mythic meaning that Motherwell and his coterie of critics like to claim for his work must be discovered, not "infused." As the fact of his scholarly work on Dada suggests, Motherwell is more a student of psychic automatism than part of the sensibility that created or embodied it.

Among the Abstract Expressionists, he is without doubt the man most knowledgeable about the modernist avant-garde tradition; but perhaps for that very reason, the modernist tradition—itself so iconoclastic and antitraditional—ceased being a living provocation and became . . . well, a *tradition* for him. It is something whose gestures he appropriates but whose essential outlook he finds quite foreign. In his best works, at least—*Mallarmé's Swan, The Homely Protestant, In Plato's Cave No. 1,* to name just three—he communicates something easier, more intimate, yet also somehow smaller. This is not, of course, to deny his considerable achievement. Motherwell is not more than he is, but he is not less than he is, either. As this retrospective amply demonstrated, he has created some of the most sensitive and sophisticated, if not the deepest, Abstract Expressionist art, and for this history is likely to regard him as one of the artistic leaders of his generation.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Poems *by James Ulmer, Luke Zilles, & Leslie Norris*

Ease

Waking, I thought
a blizzard had come in the night.
The impression faded with my first

deep breath: apple blossoms, the body
heavy with them, impossible to wake.
Outside the screen door, gray light

through green branches, white flowers.
My wife stirred. I guess she was dreaming
her old dream: a fox in the orchard,

stars spilling dust on the fruit.
As the sun rose, her back and shoulders
were touched gold. Bees tapped

at the screen, humming, their wings
too fast to see. I let
them do the work.

—James Ulmer

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Daily bread

Ergot schlerotia has been identified
in a sample of wheat grown in western
Washington.—The Seattle Times

You sit in the yard and find
no reason to move. Everything
you need is here. Your eyes and ears
are open fully, enough to see
the rainbow in sunlight on brick.
The sycamore you lean against
is breathing—you hear it drawing
water up its long chain of xylem.
And the sky, the sky is not blue
but forty blues, and toward dusk
a pale green through which bats
trace their elaborate letters.
And later, when you return
to milking cows, mending
the split-rail fence, the substantiality
of stable and field, your daily bread,
you will know where you walk
is holy. Something rises from what you plant—
it is in the wheat,
those thousand thin women with their hair
on fire. Listen in the field—
what you hear is not the wind only.

—*James Ulmer*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A question

If it comes at all,
to save what is left of your life,
it comes as the familiar ghost
of a hope.

It is an unconsidered thing,
as old-fashioned as snow in winter,
as daily as the light you ignore
until it speaks to you.

In the poor part of town,
you pass a wretched house, a home,
the clapboards weathered to apple-green
peeling to dirty white.

The picket fence in front
is a crotchety row of sticks.
On the rotted sill of the window
snow scrolls against the glass.

In the window
the lady has hung her lace curtain,
the net embroidered across the top
with a floral border.

In this arbor,
trailing its bridal tail
over a crochet fence,
a white peacock stands

to ask in what hope
of loveliness
to forgive the suffering
will you live?

—*Luke Zilles*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hudson's geese

". . . I have, from time to time,
related some incident of my boyhood,
and these are contained in various
chapters in The Naturalist in La
Plata, Birds and Man, Adventures
among Birds . . . ."
—W.H. Hudson, in
Far Away And Long Ago

Hudson tells us of them,
the two migrating geese,
she hurt in the wing
indomitably walking
the length of a continent,
and he circling above
calling his distress.
They could not have lived.
Already I see her wing
scraped past the bone
as she drags it through rubble.
A fox, maybe, took her
in his snap jaws. And what
would he do, the point
of his wheeling gone?
The wilderness of his cry
falling through an air
turned instantly to winter
would warn the guns of him.
If a fowler dropped him,
let it have been quick,
pellets hitting brain
and heart so his weight
came down senseless,
and nothing but his body
to enter the dog's mouth.

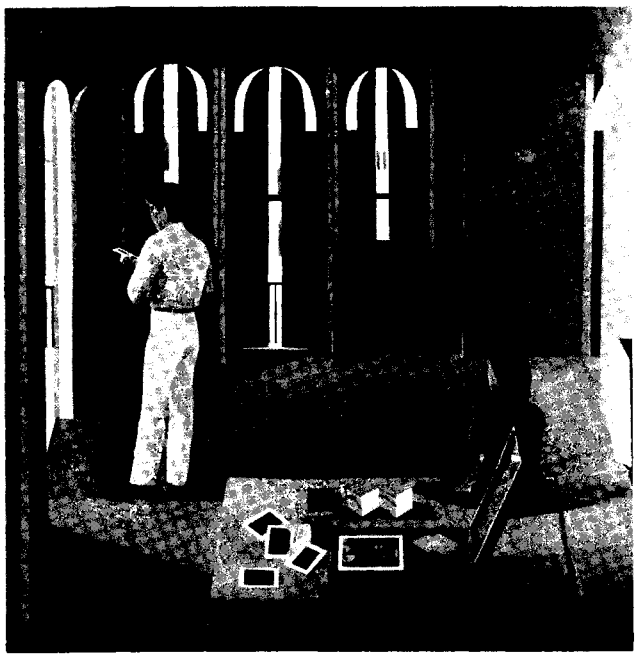
—*Leslie Norris*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Caren Canier

Recent Paintings

March 2–March 27



A Hotel Room in Venice, 1982
Oil on canvas
60 x 60″

Robert Schoelkopf Gallery *50 W 57 NY 10019*

SIMEON LAGODICH: Abandoned Orchard, 1985. Oil on canvas, 48″x68″, detail.

TATISTCHEFF

TATISTCHEFF

50 WEST 57 ST · NEW YORK 10019 · (212) 664-0907

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Theater

Kundera and his master

by Mimi Kramer

In the first few moments of Milan Kundera'a play *Jacques and His Master*—which had its American premiere this season at the American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge under the directorship of Susan Sontag—two men in eighteenth-century garb walk out onstage. One of them, on catching sight of the audience, gapes in uncomfortable surprise. "Sir," whispers the servant, gesturing toward the audience, "Why are they staring at us?" And the master, who seems to be made no less uncomfortable by the circumstances, offers some sound theatrical advice: "Pretend there's no one there," he says.

It is a cute opening and, if the American Repertory Theatre had not cluttered up the actors' entrance by having them haul onstage a lot of unnecessary and distracting props, it might have been as effective as the self-consciously theatrical opening usually is in the many contemporary plays that use it. Unfortunately, it was precisely the wrong opening for this particular play.

Jacques and His Master is loosely based on or, at any rate, inspired by Denis Diderot's eighteenth-century novel *Jacques le fataliste.* The Diderot novel is one that is particularly dear to Kundera's heart and he has, on more than one occasion, discussed it thoughtfully as an important anomaly in the context of European literature. In his introduction to the American edition of the play (published last month by Harper & Row), Kundera makes it clear that he does not consider *Jacques and His Master* an adaptation of Diderot's novel. He calls his play alternately "a variation" on a theme by Diderot and an "homage" to him. It is clear, however, that apart from invidious comparisons with Diderot's work, Kundera expects his play to succeed on some level on its own terms. Actually, there isn't much to *Jacques and His Master*: it is really more of a *divertissement* or *bagatelle* than a variation. Moreover, it is hard to see what sort of "homage" Kundera thought he was offering to Diderot, for in transcribing Diderot's themes for another instrument—the stage rather than the printed word—Kundera has rendered the notes almost unrecognizable.

Jacques le fataliste has the distinction of being possibly the only novel more wayward and rambunctious than *Tristram Shandy.* It is, like *Tristram Shandy,* a *tour de force* effected by the author's consistent refusal to take the form of the novel seriously. But Diderot goes one better than Sterne. *Tristram Shandy* plays merry hell with its reader by rendering completely arbitrary both the events narrated and the order in which they are told. Sterne tells us what he likes when he likes with a Peck's Bad Boy insouciance calculated to rob the reader of any faith he might have had in the novel form, let alone in the author's sanity. And, of course, suggesting the limitations of the novel is part of Sterne's game.

But for all his jokes and messing around at the expense of the novel form, there is one novelistic convention to which Laurence

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sterne does, in fact, adhere: the supposition that the story he is telling is true. As we read the episodes and anecdotes that make up the lives of Walter Shandy and Dr. Slop, Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim, we are never for a moment expected to doubt the fact that the story proceeds as it does (i.e., that things are said to have happened) because events occurred in a certain way. We are, in other words, being asked to play along in the little game that fiction, by its very nature, requires of the reader, the private, unconscious, and instinctive pretense of belief.

No so in Diderot. What Diderot wants first and foremost in *Jaques le fataliste* is to undermine the whole assumption on which storytelling is based: the feigned gullibility on the part of the reader, the silent compact with the author—into which every reader enters willingly the moment he opens a novel—to pretend to believe (on some emotional level) that the story he is about to read is true. The biggest running gag in *Jacques le fataliste* is Diderot's constant appeal to the arbitrariness of the narrative form. With the very first sentence, he robs the reader of his right to know the most rudimentary facts about the story he is about to hear.

> How had they met? By chance, like most people. What were their names? What's that to you? Where had they come from? From where they'd been just before. Where were they going? Does anyone ever know where he's going? What were they saying? The Master wasn't saying much of anything; and Jacques was saying . . . .

With the single detail of Jacques' remark—something to the effect that "Everything good or bad that happens on earth is written so on high"—Diderot has pretty well set forth the themes he means to play with as well as the rules of composition.

Diderot's concerns in *Jacques le fataliste* are essentially three. He is marginally interested in the debate between free will and determinism—in a jokey sort of way; he is piqued by the question of how we are to judge complex human behavior by the standards of a makeshift and simplistic morality; and he is fascinated by the phenomenon of the novel itself, the question of its validity as a realistic literary genre. In the service of this question Diderot has written a novel that, like *Tristram Shandy,* is essentially about nothing. In *Jacques le fataliste* two virtually anonymous figures, a master and a servant, journey from nowhere in partiuclar to a place that is only very vaguely someplace else. They ride and walk and stop for rest and nourishment and bad weather, and on their way they tell each other stories. Scarcely anything happens to them on their journey (until the very end) except that sometimes, when the weather is particularly bad, they are obliged to put up at an inn where they may encounter other storytellers. This comes as a welcome relief to the reader, to be quite frank, for the primary story we are meant to be attending to—the great love of Jacques' life—rarely gets anywhere. The Master is constantly interrupting Jacques; and when *he* isn't interruptiing, the narrator is.

In addition to the story of Jacques' *amours,* there are four major narratives. Toward the end of the novel Jacques exchanges the complex and ribald history of his virginity for a story from the Master about how he was first gulled by his best friend into losing his mistress and then trapped into paying child support for his mistress's baby by the villainous dear friend. In the middle of the novel there is a brilliant pair of tales that serve as companion pieces. The landlady of the inn where the Master and Jacques have to put up for a day tells of Madame de La Pommeraye, an honest and virtuous widow, and the loving, painstaking revenge she wreaks on a nobleman who has tired of her favors. The next morning, setting out on their journey again, Jacques and the Master are treated by that very nobleman to a story about an extraordinarily appealing corrupt abbot whose genius for evasion thwarts all efforts toward punishment or reform.

Admittedly, for all the entertainment value shored up in these inner narrations and for all their capacity to amuse, what they add up

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to is shockingly little to have happen in a novel of three hundred pages. But Diderot's narrative virtues lean more toward form than content and what keeps *Jacques le fataliste* consistently intriguing—as well as making it genuinely laugh-out-loud funny (in the way that Fielding's *Shamela* and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* are funny) is the form Diderot uses to debunk the novel. In addition to the dialogue form (in which much of the novel is written) and the normal direct discourse of conventional fiction, Diderot invents a third narrative mode in which to tell the story of Philosophical John: the Mode of Interruption.

The most unusual feature of *Jacques le fataliste* is the way in which Diderot is forever interrupting whichever narrator happens to have the floor, and suspending the action of whatever story is being told. Scarcely a page goes by without Diderot interrupting either himself or someone else for the purpose of making a point about the nature of the novel. In Diderot's favorite disruptive device, he breaks into an imaginary dialogue with the reader—very much like the dialogue that begins the novel—usually about some aspect of the story itself and almost always heated. The narrator's mock relationship with the reader, in fact, deteriorates markedly as the novel progresses until, toward the end, Diderot becomes openly abusive, haranguing the reader, calling him names, and sulking.

Put yourself in the reader's shoes. Imagine it: there you are, Joe Reader, happily buzzing along in your book and, if not eager then certainly willing to learn what happens next; when suddenly, for no reason at all, the narrator interrupts the story and attributes to you certain aggressively clever or provocative remarks, some criticism of his narrative judgment or conjecture about where the story will tend. Diderot answers the objection (or confounds the guess) and immediately answers himself back on your behalf until a sort of row breaks out on some weird meta-fictional plane between artifice and imagination. Thus, for example, Diderot interrupting poor Jacques in mid-speech:

> At that moment, from a little way off, they heard a clamor of shouts and cries behind them. Turning their heads, they made out a band of men armed with pikes and pitchforks advancing on them at full speed.

It is an exciting moment. But Diderot goes on:

> You will think it was the men from the inn, the brigands whom we just left and their lackeys . . . . You will think this little army fell on Jacques and his master and that a bloody skirmish ensued, blows exchanged, pistols fired; and it's entirely up to me whether that happened or not . . . .

But, Diderot continues, if it did then that would be the end of "la verité d'histoire" as well as the end of the story of Jacques' *amours*. So the little army of men just disappears.

And if Diderot interrupts Jacques, he interrupts himself just as often: so that when a peasant with a pretty girl riding pillion behind him comes up alongside of the two companions, "What could this episode not grow into in my hands," Diderot exclaims, "if I took it into my head to drive you wild!"

> I would make this woman an important character, a niece of the curate in the next village. . . . Why shouldn't Jacques fall in love a second time? Why shouldn't he once again become his master's rival and even triumph over him?—Is that in fact what had already happened once?—Questions, always questions! So you don't want Jacques to go on with the story of his *amours*? Once and for all: make up your mind. Is that what you want or isn't it? If so . . . .

And almost like a movie-maker running the film backward, Diderot has the girl and her peasant get back up on their horse and ride out of the narrative picture.

There would seem to be no limit to Diderot's capacity for playing silly games at the expense of the novel form. Things only seem to happen in the outer story of the journey

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in order to give the narrator a chance to interrupt Jacques; and if the narrator *does* interrupt Jacques with an event occurring in the outer story of the journey, it is simply to prove that he can do it and the event—as often as not—comes to nothing. If he deigns to give a character analysis it is only to annoy us with a pause at an exciting moment. He imagines a reader clamoring for a digressive anecdote and eager to have another put aside. Then he sulks and says he'll tell the story however he likes: it's *his* story, and whether we like it or not is the least of his concerns; he's perfectly happy to talk to himself! He refuses to tell us where Jacques and the Master are headed, tells us anyway, takes it back and forgets that he has changed his mind, comes up with another idea and pretends that he has only just remembered the exact circumstances. He gives the reader a choice of two alternative endings to an episode. He even gets himself mixed up in the narrative.

> It was late; the city gates were shut and they were obliged to spend the night on the outskirts of town. Suddenly, I hear a noise . . .—*You* hear a noise? You weren't there; how do *you* come into it?—You're right! Okay, Jacques . . . his master . . . they hear this tremendous racket. I see two men . . .—*You* don't see anything! This isn't about you; you weren't there.—You're right . . . .

And so forth.

Diderot's silly games, however, are not pure perversity. Or if they are, then the whole novel must be regarded as a "game" because it isn't really about the fortunes of Jacques and his Master. Nor is it even about what happens in the stories that Jacques, the Master, the landlady, and the Marquis des Arcis respectively tell, so much as it is about the nature of storytelling itself and how it either is or is not governed by the same forces that dictate and shape our lives. The debate between determinism and free will is not a serious debate, of course: neither Jacques' thinking nor the Master's is really probing enough to be very instructive or very energetic; and the question about moral judgments remains just that, a question. But the philosophical content of *Jacques le fataliste becomes* interesting by virtue of its application to the literary questions that Diderot is raising. If, as Jacques maintains, "Everything . . . is written on high," obviating a need to seek out moral causes, what then about what is *written* here below? What motivates the nature of the tale?

Diderot keeps denying that his book is a novel. His favorite argument on this point is that things don't happen in his book as they would in a novel. In a novel, he argues, the girl with the peasant *would* have become a major love-interest, the band of brigands *would* have attacked our heroes. The implication seems to be that his book is more "realistic" than a novel, but we have seen far too much of the mind behind the fiction to be expected to believe that certain events are being recounted because that is how they happened. We know that events in *Jacques le fataliste* occur or don't occur entirely in accordance with Diderot's whim and how the fancy takes him. He's told us so himself and demonstrated the fact.

Throughout *Jacques le fataliste* there seems to be an odd connection between what is happening in the debate about determinism and free will and what is happening in the main story of the journey. Sometimes an event, by occurring or failing to occur, bears Jacques out on a philosophical point or refutes him. In some places Diderot's reasoning even seems to echo Jacques' and vice versa. Jacques, for instance, explaining why a particular turn of events was never even a possibility—"Because it didn't happen"—sounds an awful lot like Diderot explaining why the story couldn't have taken a particular turn; because "adieu la verité d'histoire" if it had! Finally, toward the end of the novel there is a sort of philosophical showdown. Jacques sabotages his Master's riding gear and laughs at him provocatively when he falls off his horse. Having infuriated his Master to the point of violence, Jacques makes a clean breast of it and tells him the truth about having rigged both the accident

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the fight, claiming the episode as proof positive that the Master's actions proceed from something other than his own will. The Master is convinced. But, of course, Jacques' "proof" is really a kind of dramatized sophistry; the cause of the incident has not been fate or what was written in what Jacques calls "the great scroll in the sky." The whole episode has been the result of Jacques' own will—or his whim, rather, just as the episodes in the rest of the novel have been the result of Diderot's. That Diderot's joke has made the forces governing fiction and life equally random seems clear; but whether the point is that actual life has been shown to be as irrational and arbitrary as fiction or that fiction has proven as arbitrary and irrational as the events in human life is beyond me to say.

It is, however, this aspect of narrative horseplay applied to the notion of causality that Kundera tries to replace in *Jacques and His Master* with the self-conscious theatricality that informs the opening sequence in the play. Where Diderot has used the device of the self-conscious narrator in order to make a point about moral and narrative causes (questions about why what happens happens), Kundera has peppered his characters' dialogue with little jokes about the form of theater, about the dangers of literary adaptations and about the inconveniences of being a character in a play. Toward the end of Act I, for example, the following exchange occurs:

> MASTER *(testily)*: . . . We've still got a long way to go . . . Wait a minute, damn it! Why is it we have no horses?
> JACQUES: You forget that we're on stage. You can't have horses on stage!
> MASTER: You mean I have to walk because of a ridiculous play? The master who invented us meant us to have horses.
> JACQUES: That's a risk you take when you're invented by too many masters.
> MASTER: You know, I've often wondered whether or not we're good inventions. What do you think, Jacques? Are we well invented?

The answer to Jacques' master's question, I think, (whichever way you choose to read it) is, "yes and no." Denis Diderot was a splendid dialogist; Milan Kundera is not; moreover, as the precious exchange above suggests, his translator, Michael Henry Heim, has not an ear for either naturalistic or stylized conversation. But the real problem with *Jacques and His Master* lies deeper than that, below the surface of the words delivered onstage.

Self-conscious narrative and self-conscious theatricality are not at all the same thing. They have entirely different uses and functions. Each can be used to make a variety of points, but the eloquence of each is limited to a particular aspect of human experience. Shakespeare, Farquhar, and Tom Stoppard, for example, all call attention to the form of theater, to the notion of playacting and to the phenomenon of projecting an illusion of reality. They may be trying to make different points in doing so, but all of them are using the idea of theater figuratively in order to comment on the role of "pretense" in human relations, its purpose or its limitations. Similarly, Homer, Chaucer, and Philip Roth, for example, all call attention to the act of storytelling, the process of creating fiction, and the phenomenon of projecting an illusion of truth. They may be trying to make different points in doing so, but all of them are primarily interested in the relationship between the teller and the tale. Both devices explore the fact of man's innate gullibility and the role of artifice in our lives; but theater, because of its nature and formal properties, looks at questions of why we pretend to be other than we are, whereas narrative looks at why we tell lies.

Sometimes, in plays, self-conscious theatricality can *take the form* of narrative, just as it can take the form of oratory. Characters in the plays of Beckett or David Mamet, for instance, sometimes tell one another stories in a fashion that becomes a form of theater: they are *giving a performance* or *creating* something. But even so, this "self-conscious theatricality" is calling attention to the act of creating or performing, not to the ques-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion of why the "story" takes the form it does. There is, on the other hand (to give an example of self-conscious narrative outside of the context of Diderot), a particular tradition of medieval verse—the dream poem—in which an unidentified narrator or "speaker" tells the story of a dream he once had or a book he once read. The justification for the telling of the dream or story is already there, implicit in the convention of the genre; and yet the greatest poems coming out of this tradition—Chaucer's "Book of the Duchess," for instance, and Henryson's "Testament of Cresseid"—are all self-conscious narratives to the extent that they direct the reader's attention toward the question of why we happen to hear the dream or story in the form we do. It is the difference between examining the impulse toward art and examining the mystery behind why the work takes the shape it does.

In *Jacques and His Master* Kundera has kept all the basic elements of Diderot's novel except one. Like *Jacques le fataliste,* it is made up of stories. The same anonymous master-and-servant pair journey between the same two unspecified points, chatting, philosophizing, and telling each other stories. They stop at the same inn they find shelter at in Diderot's novel, encounter the same innkeeper there and listen to the same history of Madame de La Pommeraye. As in the novel, Jacques relates how he lost his virginity in an attic with his best friend's girl and the Master tells of being duped by a disingenuous dear friend. ("Our adventures, Master, seem strangely similar," says Jacques.) The events being narrated are acted out for the benefit of the audience and the storyteller himself (in the tradition of *Story Theater*) goes back and forth between telling the tale and helping to act it out, while other characters sit by and "listen." And the listeners, for their part, interrupt them with a Diderot-like regularity that inflates the three stories into a full evening of theater.

But because there is no narrator, no single, controlling intelligence directing the shape of events, Kundera's attempts to approximate the narrative experience of stories-within-stories doesn't come off. In Diderot's novel there were two parallel creative movements going on—the story Diderot was telling us about Jacques and his Master, and the stories that Jacques and his Master heard themselves—and by having his two parallel storylines descant on one another, Diderot was able to demonstrate something about the creative process. But in *Jacques and His Master,* although someone is putting on a play for us (the American Repertory Theatre), no one is in any literal or figurative sense putting on a play for any of the characters. The scenes we see enacted are purely for our benefit: they are simply Kundera's theatrical expression of the act of storytelling, giving us something to look at as we sit in the auditorium of the Loeb Drama Center. So the little playlets we see have no formal function at all. Again, in his novel, Diderot used the narrator's habit of unceremoniously interrupting his own characters in order to suggest jokingly that the natural universe and fiction might be governed by the same rudely disruptive force. But Kundera, in his play, by having various characters interrupt one another, is able to suggest a little more than that life is made up of interruptions. Starting, perhaps, from an assumption as to which literary devices are and are not theatrical, the first thing Kundera has done has been to rid himself of that unpredictable and eccentric fellow the narrator. Unfortunately, as well as being the most entertaining character in *Jacques le fataliste,* the narrator is also the whole point.

Kundera has chosen, in fact, exactly the wrong form for adapting Diderot's novel; and the form of theater turns out to be his greatest liability. Kundera's own strengths of course are narrative, not dramatic: his own characters tend not to be defined by word and action so much as by psychology and exegesis, and when they are finely drawn it is not because of what they do and say but because of why they do and say it. It is neither action nor language but motivation that concerns him. But drama is made up of language and action. In the play that Kundera has written we get no real sense of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jacques—the irrepressible, self-assured fellow who sulks when he cannot have the floor and can't hold down a job because he talks too much—or any sense of the nature of his "fatalism." Diderot's dialogue vividly depicts the plight of the would-be rationalist who cannot rid himself of human feeling:

> JACQUES: Sir, we have no way of knowing, in this life, when to rejoice and when to grieve. Good brings on evil and evil brings on good. We walk in darkness underneath whatever is written on high, equally blind in our hopes, our joys and our miseries. Often when I weep I realize I'm being an ass.
>
> MASTER: And when you laugh?
>
> JACQUES: I'm being an ass then, too. All the same, I can't keep myself from laughing and crying—that's what infuriates me so! A hundred times, I've tried to . . . well . . . so, anyway, that whole night I didn't shut my eyes once . . .
>
> MASTER: No, no. Don't stop. Tell me what you've tried to do.
>
> JACQUES: To make a joke of everything. Oh, if only I'd been able to manage it!
>
> MASTER: Why! What good would it have done?
>
> JACQUES: I wouldn't have had to care about anything; I wouldn't have had to need anything; I'd have gained complete mastery over myself; I'd have considered myself just as well off sleeping with my head on a stone, on some street corner, as sleeping on a down pillow. Sometimes I can do it, but the hell of it is that it doesn't last and that no matter how firm and rock-like I am in a crisis, there's always some little thing, some petty nothing that throws me off. I could smack myself! So I've given up on it. I've decided to just accept the way I am; and the odd thing I've noticed—just when I happen to be thinking about it, which isn't often—is that it almost comes to the same thing when you say to yourself: "Who cares about the way we are?" It's the same kind of resignation—only easier and more convenient.
>
> MASTER: More convenient, that's for sure!

Kundera does not avail himself of Diderot's dialogue, and unfortunately, his own dialogue leaves Jacques' character and that of his Master unrealized. But without their characters their personal histories are virtually meaningless: for what is interesting about the story of how Jacques "lost his virginity" on three separate occasions, about how the Master wound up caring for his best friend's bastard and about the great love of Jacques' life has less to do with what they did and suffered than with what their own accounts of the past indicate to us about their relations with the rest of mankind.

One of my favorite moments in contemporary criticism occurred some years back in *The New York Times* daily television listings when a review of John Houston's 1966 film adaptation of The Bible read simply: "The book is better."

There is, admittedly, only a limited value in making unfavorable comparisons between literary adaptations and the great novels on which they are based: in most cases, the point scarcely needs to be made. If in this case I seem to have dwelt too lovingly on the specific ways in which *Jacques and His Master* does scant justice to Diderot's novel, that is largely because the most interesting aspect of Kundera's play is the reason that it fails. And Kundera himself is a little slippery on the subject, to be perfectly honest. He does, of course, protest at great length in his introductory essay that his play is *not* an adaptation. He also discusses the formal problems of the phenomenon of generic adaptation in some particularity—but with reference to *Anna Karenina*. He suggests that the idea of trying to "adapt" *Jacques le fataliste* would be ludicrous and even gives a list of reasons why. Nowhere, however, does he mention the crucial point. He talks of form and of failure but does not connect the two, does not seem to be aware that what makes the idea of adapting *Jacques le fataliste* technically ludicrous is the fact that its form is one for which theater has no equivalent and that its concerns are such as theater cannot explore.

And yet it would be strange indeed were Kundera not aware of Diderot's concerns

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in *Jacques le fataliste*—not because Kundera loves the novel but because that technique and those concerns are so similar to his own. Kundera's play apparently dates from the end of a period of writing that was followed by a silence of several years (a silence that Kundera alludes to in his essay, but does not explain). To be sure, the play itself seems to have no connection with Diderot on any but the most superficial level. But it would be wrong to dismiss the play without pointing out that the novel that broke Kundera's silence, and with which he really made his appearance on the American literary scene—*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*—actually does. It bears an extraordinary resemblance to *Jacques le fataliste,* in fact, most obviously in the curious quality of narrative self-consciousness that characterizes the novel.

Like Diderot in *Jacques le fataliste,* Kundera uses three distinct voices in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting.* Sometimes he is the omniscient narrator hiding behind the veil of fiction; sometimes he becomes the essayist juxtaposing moments from his own life with moments from recent history. Sometimes, though, these two voices seem to meet and blend, becoming a sort of "middle" voice: that of a man telling a story and at the same time stepping back to watch himself in the act of telling a story, commenting on the movements of his pen. Thus Kundera can suddenly "just picture" one of his characters at a particular moment, or ask himself why he pictures another in a certain way. He can be unconvinced by one explanation for a character's feelings (as though we were having an argument), or, like Diderot, tell us we have to "put up with" the way he tells the story. He can "watch" a group of his own characters "from a distance of two thousand kilometers" (where he sits in voluntary exile in Western Europe, writing) and "see them against the night lights of Prague the way it was fifteen years ago . . . ." Or announce that the lone figure of another character is "out there somewhere" if only he could find her. It is, of course, Diderot's narrative mode played in a lyrical rather than a bumptious melody; but when Kundera uses it his Mirek and his Zdena, his Karel, Marketa, and Eva, his Tamina and his poets and students all become dwellers in that metafictional place between artifice and imagination that *Jacques and His Master* first claimed in the name of Denis Diderot.

Kundera's themes in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* are more numerous and complex than Diderot's. There are ideas about death, perspective, music, writing, and human understanding—as well as "laughter and forgetting"—and a curious untranslatable Czech word *(litost),* which seems to denote the disillusioned grief we feel when we find our private narcissistic images of ourselves betrayed by an ungenerous reality. But, like Diderot, Kundera has an interest in undercutting our notions of causality in regard to human experience; and so, like Diderot's, his fiction cheats our expectation and the romanticized assumptions by which we locate the origin of human action in a rational or even passionate motivation.

Where all these themes seem to come together for Kundera, moreover, is in the notion of *writing,* or our relationship with writing as the manifestation of the *"litost"* inspired by the realization that we cannot expect to understand the irrational workings of the universe. For Kundera, imagination becomes in this context a part of that irrational universe: the irrational impulse driving us to art, music, or fiction in an attempt to assuage the guilt we feel for being unable to comprehend.

How far is this, though, from Diderot's own point and his final comment on the nature of the novel? That final showdown between Jacques and his Master seems to have no point unless it is to suggest something about the human impulse toward philosophical reasoning. Jacques' little experiment, after all, proves nothing about causes or effects except that his own desire to prove something about the way the universe works has influenced the course of events. But since throughout Diderot's novel the idea of fictional motivation and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the ideas of first causes have been reflexive of one another, the incident in the novel seems to point to the whole motivation behind the writing of fiction: that the writing of novels is (like Jacques' willful and whimsical provocation of his Master) the manifestation of our need to exercise some cognitive power over the incomprehensible mess we see before us.

Jacques and His Master is not a very good play on anyone's terms—Diderot's or Kundera's own. But perhaps Kundera's true "homage" to Diderot may be found in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. And perhaps there, too, is to be found the explanation for why Milan Kundera might have wanted to do this crazy thing in the first place —what it was that Kundera so loved about this obscure eighteenth-century novel that he might have wanted to make it his own, even if that meant writing a not-very-good play.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art

The real Robert Morris?

by Eric Gibson

Every so often an artist, for good or ill, captures the imagination of the public in a way no other artist of the moment can. Last season it was Jasper Johns, exhibiting for the first time in nearly a decade. This season it was supposed to be Julian Schnabel, but his show at the Pace Gallery—his inaugural exhibition there—failed to generate much interest. Pace had substantially reconstructed its gallery space over the summer in order to accommodate Schnabel's enormous paintings (they would not have even made it through the door had things remained as they were). Unfortunately, the art itself lacked the stature to justify this unusual development.

It was left to Robert Morris to produce the sort of "hot" show the season had lacked. Early in the new year Leo Castelli's gallery on Greene Street and the Sonnabend Gallery on West Broadway showed Morris's new work (Castelli included some work from the Seventies as well). What made the show a spectacle was a combination of several things: its sheer Baroque expansiveness, the *volte-face* it seemed to represent in Morris's aesthetic preoccupations, and its interesting relation to current artistic concerns.

The subject of Morris's new work is the apocalypse, the nuclear apocalypse in particular. It consists of paintings resembling magnified details of late Turner that are framed by densely packed reliefs of organs, skulls, skeletons, severed limbs, and vegetation—a sort of post-apocalypse soup made up of whatever remains. One uses the term "framed" advisedly, for in fact the paintings are not surrounded completely. One large relief rests at the top and upper corners of the canvas; two others each "frame" a bottom corner. They are placed above or in front of each picture. We are not intended to see them as decorative embellishments but as integral to the animating idea: the painting refers to what will transpire and the reliefs form a sort of universal *memento mori*—a vision of what will be left in the wake of the maelstrom. To this end they are hieratically ordered. One, for example, shows three skulls gathered at the top center, the central skull facing the viewer, the flanking two facing outward. These recall the kind of structure seen in Gothic portals, where the mandorla is both a beckoning image and a sign intended to avert evil.

The largest of Morris's new works which were shown at Castelli, came with various forms of sculptural embellishment—a perforated X shape is placed in front of one, for example—and they were vast. More than their size, however, it was the overwhelming expansiveness and theatricality of these works that was the most striking. It is as though Morris felt compelled to match the scale of his vision with the scale of his subject. In this respect the new work is the elaborate, fully worked out version of a change we have seen glimpses of in recent years, as Morris has turned away from the enigmatic literalness of his earlier, Minimalist work. A

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

1983 show, for example, included charcoal drawings linked thematically to the current paintings and plastic reliefs nearly identical to those recently on view.

As if to help us measure the distance Morris has travelled, the Castelli Gallery presented, alongside the newest work, Morris's *Hearing* from 1972. Here, on a raised platform, sat a copper chair and a lead-covered table and couch. The latter two were connected to a battery. In addition, one could hear a faint recorded sequence of voices, presumably the "hearing" of the title. Taken together, these elements gave the work a distinct, deeply unsettling overtone, one achieved, moreover, through a remarkable spareness of means. The simple, elemental materials, the clear contours and smooth unembellished surfaces helped to create an atmosphere redolent of imminent violence.

By contrast, in Morris's new work there is a curious emptiness: it fails to induce the kind of fear one might expect to feel, given its imagery. The viewer ends up feeling that the artist has allowed theatricality and expansiveness per se to become his principal message. One looks in vain for the kind of pointedness one finds in *Hearing*.

Moreover, for all Morris's Baroque fervor, there is a curious element of detachment in his work. This is partially explained by his approach to his subject: the source of his pictorial imagery is Leonardo's *Deluge* drawings. They give him a perspective different from that of his contemporaries who are also involved with apocalyptic imagery. His treatment of the subject may be more universal, but it is also less particular, less personal.

The problem of detachment was especially acute in the Sonnabend half of the recent show. Painting after painting adorned the walls; they were smaller in size than those a few blocks away at Castelli but otherwise identical. Far from affording amplification and expansion of Morris's themes, the sheer profusion of work, not to mention its assembly-line repetition, vitiated its already meager impact.

There has always been a strong element of performance and theatricality in Morris's art. At times it can be literal, as in the tableau of *Hearing,* or in the celebrated *I-Box,* where, behind a large letter "I" that opens like a door, one sees a full-length photograph of Morris himself, naked. At other times the theatricality is gestural. In *Felts,* for example, thick strips of felt are affixed to the wall and allowed to hang at random, the point being a deliberate undermining of notions of aesthetic order and completeness since the configuration alters from installation to installation beyond the artist's capacity to direct it. Here, and elsewhere in Morris's work, one has the feeling that, in an almost Duchampian way, the artist is speaking to us from behind the work, that he is offstage and yet present at the same time. We get the feeling, in other words, that the work of art is not the end point in the artistic statement so much as a kind of reflexive gesture intended to direct our attention back to the artist himself.

Writing of Morris's 1983 show in *The Village Voice,* Roberta Smith made a similar point: "I also find it [Morris's work] fascinating—both in itself and for its ongoing commentary on shifts in the art world's aesthetic climate. At times his work has seemed more a form of criticism than art, as if it were the doings of an extremely astute art critic living out a fantasy of being an important artist." Following this train of thought, one might view this new work as a wily jab at Neo-Expressionism, as though Morris wanted to show that he could go Schnabel et al. one better—while daring them to follow. This could also explain the work's combination of Baroque elaboration with a fundamental vacuity.

It is this role as performer therefore —with its posture of detachment—that emerges as the major constituent of Morris's artistic personality. It confers on his oeuvre an aura of ongoing spectacle. Indeed, it could be said of Morris that it is the performance itself, rather than its material residue in created works of art, that is the principal artistic statement.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Photography

Photography and architecture: notes on a conference

by Gail Buckland

On a mild weekend in Ottawa last fall, while scores of tourists walked along the Ottawa River snapping photographs of the imposing parliamentary buildings and joining "Historic Tours" of the city, a host of curators, art historians, photographers, architects, and students assembled at the National Gallery of Canada for a symposium entitled "Photography and Architecture 1839 to the Present Day." The symposium was held in conjunction with an exhibition at the museum—"Photography and Architecture: 1839-1939"—which was on tour from the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal. The camera-toting tourists were a reminder, at least for this writer, of certain basic truths sometimes overlooked: that buildings are clues to civilization; that they show the coherence of a society and relate culture to commerce, politics, and community; and that the way we envision city structures, both past and present, is often based on the photographs we have seen: the snapshots, picture postcards, textbook illustrations, and professional renditions.

Architecture was a natural subject for photography in its early days, when exposures were long of necessity: buildings were guaranteed not to move, and it took no longer for the camera to copy a thousand stones than one. What is more, the public enjoyed architectural photographs. They appeared mainly as both large, detailed salt and albumen prints and as inexpensive stereo views. The Victorians liked their recreation educational, so the contemplation in one's parlor of the great buildings of the world was a pastime especially suited to their tastes and times.

In the twentieth century, photographers took the skyscraper as a symbol of modernism and often paid homage to particular buildings. They also wandered from factories to farms, from the historic settings of New England to the urban sprawl and blandness of the New West, making architecture, as a subject, the equal of portraiture and landscape. It wasn't just the shape of the structures that interested them; buildings revealed the layering of life—in posters and coats of paint, for instance—as they adapted to, and transcended, the human life cycle.

The first speaker at the Ottawa symposium was Peter Bacon Hales, author of the recently published *Silver Cities: Photography of American Urbanization 1839-1915.*[1] Mr. Hales talked about the destruction of cities. Ruins, it would seem, are of more interest to photographic historians than architecture. John Szarkowski, the director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, made reference in his own talk to the old Beaux-Arts professor who had said that good architecture makes good ruins.

1 *Silver Cities: The Photography of American Urbanization 1839-1915* by Peter B. Hales: Temple University Press, 400 pages, $47.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notably, the keynote address was given by John Brinckerhoff Jackson, a landscape historian and the author of *The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics.* In fact, six of the ten papers presented over the two days discussed images of antiquity or of architecture now destroyed. The museum's exhibition was abundant as well with ruined abbeys and pictures of the Roman Forum, Chichén-Itzá, the Acropolis, Yüan Ming Yüan in Peking, and Middle Eastern antiquities. All in all, the exhibition gave a much more balanced view of the range of architectural photography than the talks did. Drawing as it did from probably the finest collection of architectural photographs in the world, it showed the power and beauty of the genre in an unparalleled way.

Mr. Hales began his talk by citing the prevalence of fire in American cities in the nineteenth century. Before the notorious Chicago fire of 1871 there were conflagrations in New York, Charleston, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Portland, Maine, to name just a few locations. Cities were built rapidly during the nineteenth century to fill the needs of growing populations; that they were also cinderboxes seemed to be of relatively little importance. By those who believed, like Thomas Jefferson, that the city was "a plague upon the body politic," these fires were seen as a form of divine retribution. But Mr. Hales argued that they were not punitive but purgative. Because of them Americans again had an opportunity to build a "city upon a hill"; gradually, of course, it would become a city with skyscrapers and advanced architecture.

Mr. Jackson has addressed this aspect of rejuvenation in his essay "The Necessity for Ruins":

> . . . there has to be [an] interval of neglect, there has to be discontinuity; it is religiously and artistically essential. That is what I mean when I refer to the necessity for ruins: ruins provide the incentive for restoration, and for a return to origins. There has to be (in our new concept of history) an interim of death or rejection before there can be renewal and reform. The old order has to die before there can be a born-again landscape.
>
> Are we perhaps trying to re-enact some ancient myth of birth, death, and redemption?

American ruins, like most things American, were far from permanent; they lasted only weeks or days. If myths were to be made from them and lessons learned, a record of the scars would be necessary. It is here, Mr. Hales argued, that photography played a vital role in shaping the American consciousness.

Like other photographs taken of cities during the nineteenth century, photographs of the aftermath of destruction helped organize and unify the scene. One of the points Mr. Hales makes in his book is that photographs provided an edited, comprehensible view of city life. Such a view elevated the city above the randomness and sordidness actually experienced on the streets. Photographers were able to convince even the inhabitants of a particular city that there was order, beauty, and purpose to their urban lives: the churches, schools, banks, offices, and houses of the wealthy were there to prove that indeed the city was synonymous with success and culture. In 1893, when Abdul Hamid II, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, wanted to show the United States government that his country was modernizing and progressing, he sent fifty-one volumes of photographs to the Library of Congress. For the most part, they showed institutional buildings in Constantinople. In the nineteenth century, when Americans themselves needed to be convinced that their culture was equal to that of Europe, they used as evidence, according to Mr. Hales, the carefully composed photographs of cities, photographs that showed no trace of slums and disorder.

This obsession with visual artifice reached its pinnacle during the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893, where an "ideal city"—the so-called White City—was presented to the world. In *The Incorporation of America,* Alan Trachtenberg cites an article written by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Elmer Bischoff

Recent Paintings

16 March – 13 April

HIRSCHL & ADLER Modern

851 Madison Avenue New York, New York 10021 212 744-6700

the architect Henry Van Brunt before the Exposition opened. It describes what some of the objectives were:

> . . . to present a complete and symmetrical picture of modern civilization . . . the Columbian Exposition should not only bring together evidences of the amazing material productiveness which, within the century, has effected a complete transformation in the external aspects of life, but should force into equal prominence, if possible, corresponding evidences that the finer instincts of humanity have not suffered complete eclipse in this grosser prosperity, and that, in this headlong race, art has not been left entirely behind. The management of the Exposition is justified in placing machinery, agricultural appliances and products, manufactures and the liberal arts, the wonderful industrial results of scientific investigation, and other evidences of practical progress, in the midst of a parallel display shaped entirely by sentiment and appealing to a fundamentally different set of emotions. It is the high function of architecture not only to adorn this triumph of materialism, but to condone, explain and supplement it, so that some elements of "sweetness and light" may be brought forward to counterbalance the boastful Philistinism of our times.

This White City, with its "cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces," was devoted to three elements of design: unity, magnitude, and illusion (to borrow Montgomery Schuyler's terms). It was of great concern to the Exposition's organizers that the White City not be shown to be, as Professor Trachtenberg put it, "mere scaffolding for pictures of ancient buildings, clusters of stylistic allusion to traditions irrelevant to America." So the World's Columbian Commission chose a photographer—Charles Dudley Arnold, who had worked for some of the New York architects designing the Exposition and who specialized in illustrating Beaux-Arts neoclassicism—and gave him exclusive rights to the making and selling of photographs of the White City. Mr. Hales, who describes the major role

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of photography in disseminating the official image of the event in *Silver Cities,* writes:

> When the contract was finally signed, Arnold had a virtual monopoly over the photographic dissemination. Newspapers, periodicals, even the official guidebook were required to use only photographs made or approved by him, and Arnold had sole control over their release. Only stereographic production was out of his hands. In addition, no cameras larger than 4 x 5 were to be allowed on the grounds, and no tripods whatsoever were to be permitted. Exceptions to these rules were, again, matters left to Arnold's discretion.

Arnold's large plate camera gave fine-grain, unblemished pictures that, like the technical masterpieces of Ansel Adams, met spiritual as well as documentary needs. They were evidence of the success of the planners' vision and they seemed to justify the expense and effort of the thousands of people who had travelled to Chicago in 1893 to see the event and to satisfy the dreams of the millions who never went. Most everyone agreed that the White City was a sublime expression of American ascendancy in commerce and culture. Lest we underestimate the function of photography in the perception of this event, it is well to recall some observations of William Ivins on photography's function in society: "At any given moment," Ivins wrote, "the accepted report of any event is of greater importance than the event, for what we think about and act upon is the symbolic report and not the concrete event itself." And he added: "The nineteenth century began by believing that what was reasonable was true and it would end up by believing that what it saw a photograph of was true."

Louis Sullivan, regarded by many as the spiritual father of modern American architecture, considered the Exposition a rejection of progressive American design. He wrote that "The damage [to American architecture] wrought by the World's Fair will last for half a century from its date, if not longer." The sentiment that lay behind Sullivan's remark was addressed recently by the architectural historian Bruno Zevi at a conference in New York. "Classicism is revived," Mr. Zevi said, "when you want to build an eternal removed from everyday life." He called classicism the "myth of stability" and said that monumental architecture was architecture to be contemplated, not entered. Louis Sullivan's contribution to the 1893 Exposition had been the Transportation Building (with its famous "Golden Doorway"). Prophetically, this non-neoclassical building housed the massive exhibits of the Pullman Company, whose strike of the following year would play havoc with the nation's "stability."

American photographers in the twentieth century looked to Sullivan's buildings for representations of a truly American idea within the context of the city. In this connection, Mr. Szarkowski cited his own early photographic book, from 1956, entitled *The Idea of Louis Sullivan.* His proposal to the publisher had been to show a Sullivan building as "a real building which people work in and ignore." He admitted to having been shocked when the publisher accepted his ideas. To act as a street photographer and photojournalist—as Szarkowski wanted to work—and to think you could also depict architecture was considered a radical claim, so bound by convention had the discipline become. The photographer, in the conventional view, was supposed to isolate and elevate a building, not show it as any passerby on the street would see it.

Mr. Szarkowski laughed when he tried to recall the exact words in one of the reviews of his book. He believed they were: "Mr. Szarkowski purports to tell something about the architecture of Louis Sullivan." But there were those who thought this possible for a photographer to do. Among them was Richard Nickel, who devoted his life to photographing the architecture of Sullivan. As was pointed out by John Vinci, the architect and restorer of Sullivan's works who also spoke in Ottawa, what made Nickel a great architectural photographer was his ability

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JULES OLITSKI
Recent Paintings
February 27 - March 21
FRIEDEL DZUBAS
Recent Paintings
March 23 - April 11
M. Knoedler & Co.
19 East 70 Street. New York 10021. Telephone (212) 794-0550

to show something fundamental about the buildings in his photographs—the way the terra-cotta fastens to the frame, for example, or some detail of basic structure.

For Mr. Szarkowski, "The subject is not there when you get there. You define it in the process of working." Like the photographer Garry Winogrand, who said "I photograph to find out what something will look like photographed," Mr. Szarkowski believes that the subject of a photograph exists only within the frame of the picture, that there cannot be two versions of the same subject. In his introduction to *The Work of Atget,* for example, he cited two photographs taken from almost the identical vantage point. The earlier one, he wrote, is concerned with "the solid structure and the bold graphics of midday; the later one with the sweet and private atmosphere of early morning . . . [and the] perfect placement of the horsedroppings." In the same essay he also wrote: "The photographer's problem [is] the discovery and precise definition of a new subject—a coherent idea, plucked from an incoate sea of subject matter." In the best of Atget's work he finds no sense of the "poetic impulse being defeated by the lumpen materiality of the real world . . . . As Atget grew older he made his pictures out of less and less." Critics of Mr. Szarkowski who don't like less and less will say "horse-droppings," but I believe he is essentially correct.

Wandering the streets of Paris and the surrounding parks and countryside with his antiquated photographic apparatus, Atget was—at least in Mr. Szarkowski's view—the great modern photographer for whom there is no subject except that which is found in the process of working. Like an alchemist, he transformed something common into something precious. In the history of photography Atget is the bridge to the twentieth century, and indeed Atget *was* a brilliant artist. He did not teach us how to see as, for example, Walker Evans did, but he did show us that the camera could be used as delicately and individually as a finely pointed pencil in the hand of the most sensitive and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

gifted draftsman. He showed us, too, that the camera could escape the materiality of the world by using objects like a poet uses words—choosing, placing, spacing them. And the objects Atget used most often were architectural.

Peter Galassi, associate curator of photography at the Museum of Modern Art, spoke on the conference's last day. His interests and instincts are quite different from his colleague's. It is his belief that there is a lineal progression from painting and printmaking to the pictures made with the camera. He is frequently quoted for saying that "photography was not a bastard left by science on the doorstep of art, but a legitimate child of the Western pictorial tradition."

In Ottawa, Mr. Galassi proposed that photographers were locked into an art historical tradition from the very inception of the medium, that the early professionals really had very little leeway in the types of images they made. To illustrate his point, Mr. Galassi showed representations of the Roman Forum made prior to and immediately after the invention of photography. The slides showed that, except for birds-eye views such as those made by Piranesi, photographers presented the Roman Forum in ways similar to the printmakers'. Indeed, they gradually usurped the printmakers' market. The photographic tour of the Forum followed the same steps that printmakers had followed since the seventeenth century. If aspects of the photographic print had a "new" feel to them, the public at least would be comforted to find that the monuments still looked the same. Mr. Galassi stated that, in fact, representations of the Forum remained unchanged until excavations in the 1870s and 1880s transformed the Forum itself. Through a traditional approach to architecture and antiquity the photographers, many of whom were former painters, consolidated their market.

In my opinion, Mr. Galassi is sometimes overzealous in arguing his hypotheses. In 1981, during a lecture given in conjunction with Mr. Galassi's exhibition "Before Photography" at the Museum of Modern Art, Kirk Varnedoe stated—with humor and insight—that in photography anything can be argued and proven. He then proceeded to project slides that confirmed and contradicted every statement he made. Many of Mr. Galassi's astute observations are marred by an unwillingness to discuss issues that are related to his main point but that lie outside the confines of art history. The knowing listener is left aware of too many alternatives. That professional photographers having to earn a living from a nascent occupation should proceed cautiously and limit their productivity to meet the known needs of the marketplace does not seem surprising. Due to inexperience and an unpredictable technique, amateurs however often departed from tradition, as did photographers primarily concerned with self-expression.

Earlier in the conference, Mr. Szarkowski had helped to explain why nineteenth-century photographs often look so similar to prints. He pointed out that early cameras were made to conform to Renaissance perspective; it was the power of convention that resulted in their being designed in such a way. Until cameras were freed from tripods and long exposures, the focal plane was always parallel to the subject. And it is important to remember that photographic cameras were derived from the *camerae obscurae* used by artists exactly for the purpose of helping them draw perspective more easily. The inventors of photography merely wanted to "catch" the image they saw in the camera, not create a radical new way of seeing.

Mr. Galassi is wrong when he writes, in *Before Photography,* that the landscape sketch from the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries "catalyzed the invention of photography." He maintains that such sketches presented "a new and fundamentally modern pictorial syntax of immediate, synoptic perceptions and discontinuous unexpected forms . . . [and were] devoted to the singular and contingent rather than the universal and stable." This was also the "syntax of photography,"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

but that does not make the landscape sketch mother to fledgling photography. Much more to the point is a quotation from John Constable, from 1836, which Mr. Galassi cites in his book: ". . . painting is a science, and should be pursued as an inquiry into the laws of nature. Why then should not landscape painting be considered as a branch of natural philosophy, of which pictures are but the experiments."

The inclination in the nineteenth century was to understand the forces of nature and make them work for you, whether in a steam engine or in a painting. If artists no longer believed that their calling was more noble than the inventors', or that their themes need be religious or universal, then of course a question would arise about the nature of a picture. And answers would be found in optics and chemistry. It was not that photography could now be invented because its natural syntax conformed to a current practice among artists. Rather, men of vision wanted answers to fundamental questions and were willing to study parts of the whole in their general investigation of "natural philosophy." William Henry Fox Talbot, the inventor, in 1835, of positive-negative photography, had been the first to ask what was the "ultimate nature" of the picture in the *camera obscura.* He wrote:

> The picture, divested of the ideas which accompany it, and considered only in its ultimate nature, is but a succession or variety of stronger lights thrown upon one part of the paper, and of deeper shadows on another.

After successfully making pictures without the aid of pencil or brush, he added: "You make the powers of nature work for you, and no wonder that your work is well and quickly done." The invention of photography changed the definition of a picture, but it did not, as Mr. Galassi correctly deduces, necessarily change what a picture looked like in content and form.

Although many Ph.D. candidates in the relatively new field called the history of photography would like to convince us that it would be beneficial to look at a few hundred photographs of a subject such as Tintern Abbey, compare them to prints, and draw some conclusions (such a paper was presented at the conference), the heart and soul of the discipline still lies in the study of the works of individual photographers. Julia Ballerini's discussion of Maxime Du Camp on the last day of the conference was an example of such study.

Du Camp, a writer who was among the first to learn the calotype process in France, was given a commission from the French Ministry of Education to photograph the monuments and sites of the Middle East. With him during his travels was Gustave Flaubert. Du Camp's book *Egypte, Nubie, Palestine et Syrie,* published in 1852, contained one hundred twenty-five plates and was the first photographically illustrated travel book. Throughout the volume a solitary figure stands on or near the monuments, ostensibly giving a uniform scale to each composition. But, as Miss Ballerini demonstrated, a human figure always carries further implications. In prints and lithographs, Westerners are often shown to be contemplative, while natives lounge or engage in activity according to the political bent of the artist (or his sponsor). Du Camp had told his servant—a Nubian named Hadji-Ishmael—that the camera was a cannon that would kill him if he moved, so the man remained fearfully rigid for two minutes at a time while Du Camp exposed.

Miss Ballerini believes that Hadji-Ishmael served a role in Du Camp's obsession with death and resurrection. His father had died when Du Camp was only one year old, his mother when he was fifteen. Just before leaving for the Orient he had lost his grandmother and a close friend. As he dug among the ancient ruins, he was seeking to uncover his personal past: he believed in reincarnation and thought he had Muslim blood, that in another life he had been a hadji.

Miss Ballerini emphasized the function of the literary double as alter ego and the fre-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

quency with which this figure takes the form of a native. The uneducated, docile, sweet-natured, and muscular Hadji-Ishmael was pressed into the past, framed by the architecture, and made to serve as a living adjunct to ancient wall carvings. He was the symbol of life, of nature, and of the civilized Westerner's dark other self. Forced by Du Camp to pose nearly naked, this one-eyed native stood staring at the single lens of the Frenchman's machine and thought he would soon be dead. Du Camp, breathing in the stillness of the moment, pondered how to survive his own death.

Miss Ballerini's discussion of Du Camp brought to mind an essay by J. B. Jackson. In it he described Montaigne as the "father of tourism" and quoted him saying: "We are all of us confined and enclosed within ourselves, and see no farther than the end of our nose. This great world is a mirror where we must see ourselves in order to know ourselves." The traveller and photographer have much in common, just as the mirror and photograph do. John Szarkowski has compared the art of photography to the act of pointing. No gesture is more closely associated with the tourist than the outstretched finger. According to Jackson, for Montaigne travel "meant knowing the creations of man, his institutions and art and architecture, and something about the past." This was as true for Du Camp as it was for the weekend tourists in Ottawa, who joined the "Historic Tours" and took snapshots of the parliamentary buildings.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books

Obsessed with poetry

by Bruce Bawer

At first glance, the two most interesting American poet-critics of mid-century don't appear to have much in common. Delmore Schwartz, the New York Jewish intellectual, was turbulent, mad, brilliant, a destroyer of hotel rooms and imaginer of conspiracies. In his early poems he crossed Eliotic intellectuality with Yeatsian music and came up with a unique hybrid—an exuberant, fatalistic, teleologically compelling type of modernist poem that could be "about" anything from Orpheus to Caesar to the Romanovs' bounding ball; in his later years he dropped Eliot, found Whitman, and produced a series of bizarre, energetic, mesmeric post-Walt effusions about Seurat and Psyche and Marilyn Monroe. Randall Jarrell—to a casual observer—was quite a different sort. Serene, seemingly stable, far more comfortable in a sleepy Southern town than in a crude, dirty Northern city ("What a way to speak!" was his comment on New York accents), he was the author in his early years of quietly forceful poems about girls in libraries and dead soldiers; his later poems are pensive, wistful, sadhearted meditations about aging women and paper boys.

They would, then, seem to be worlds apart. Yet the closer one looks at their lives and work, the more convinced one is that Schwartz and Jarrell were, in the ways that matter, two of a kind. Though known for their wit, humor, and capacity for enthusiasm, both were nonetheless profoundly terrified by life. "O Life is terror-full beyond belief," writes Schwartz. "How difficult it is to know and live." And Jarrell concurs: "It is terrible to be alive." Their poems hover about a handful of themes: love, loss, loneliness, insomnia, dreams. For them death was a constant presence. "Man is born in chains," writes Jarrell, "and everywhere we see him dead." "Each moment is dying," laments Schwartz. "We cannot stand still: time is dying,/We are dying: Time is farewell!" Their fear of mortality notwithstanding, at times they seem almost to have been half in love with easeful death. In at least one poem, Schwartz imagines death as an awakening from the nightmare of life: *"O what a metaphysical victory/The first day and night of death must be!"* And Jarrell (also italics-happy) agrees: *"In the end,"* he suggests, *"we wake from everything."* The two poets felt alienated from their own bodies, Jarrell poeticizing about "his own flesh, set up outside him," and Schwartz bemoaning the existence of

> The heavy bear who goes with me
> . . .
> Moves where I move, distorting my gesture,
> A caricature, a swollen shadow,
> A stupid clown of the spirit's motive . . .

Both composed angry manifestos deploring the alienation of the poet in twentieth-century America. Jarrell argues in "The Obscurity of the Poet" that the contemporary poet "lives in a world whose newspapers and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

magazines and books and motion pictures and radio stations and television stations have destroyed, in a great many people, even the capacity for understanding real poetry." And Schwartz (in "The Vocation of the Poet in the Modern World") agrees: "As soon as the student leaves school, all the seductions of mass-culture and middlebrow culture, and in addition the whole way of life of our society, combine to make the reading of poetry a dangerous and quickly rejected luxury . . . . As soon as [the poet] departs from the pleasant confines of the university, he discovers that it is more and more true that less and less people read serious poetry."

Like their friends Robert Lowell and John Berryman—with whom they form a group of poets remarkable for the similarity of their upbringing, psychopathology, and poetic development—Jarrell and Schwartz were obsessed with poetry. Both, to be sure, were versatile writers: their literary criticism is sensitive and witty, and their fiction, at its best, is charming and original. They also had serious, non-literary intellectual interests. Schwartz took his undergraduate degree in philosophy, and Jarrell studied to be a clinical psychologist. (Both poets were—in their later years, at least—devout disciples of Freud.) They sought knowledge avidly, compulsively, self-destructively. "Knowledge and belief devour the mind of man," Schwartz observes; and Jarrell writes: "O knowledge ever harder to hold fast to,/O dream, O burden." If poetry overshadowed everything for them, it was because poetry was, to them, the ultimate form of knowledge—the *best* form, because it contained all the others: it was psychology, philosophy, physics, religion. To write poetry was to perform a physics experiment, to conduct a Freudian analysis, to hold High Mass. It was to plunge into the abyss, to make a solitary entrance into the unknown. Poetry was dangerous, harrowing—even as it renewed life, it threatened it. But neither Schwartz nor Jarrell questioned whether the enterprise was worth the risk. "Poetry should be worth a life," insists Jarrell. "Into the Destructive Element," declares Schwartz, "that is the way."

One might expect the collected letters of these two disturbed, self-dramatizing poets to enrich one's perception of the affinities between them. But the case is quite the opposite. What strikes one most forcefully, upon reading *Letters of Delmore Schwartz* and *Randall Jarrell's Letters,* is the same divergence of tone that characterizes the poems.[1] In his letters as in his verse, Schwartz nearly leaps off the page, exploding with ideas and opinions and *sui generis* turns of phrase; he is the very embodiment of agitation, artistic ambition, and *Angst.* Jarrell, on the other hand, is subdued and sensible, a gentle man with a lively but quiet wit. His letters—to speak only of the style and not the content—could be almost anybody's; Schwartz's are unique.

Partly for this reason—and partly because the story of his life describes a perfect three-act-drama bell curve—the more intriguing of these two books, hands down, is *Letters of Delmore Schwartz.* Robert Phillips (who has done an excellent job of editing and annotating) says justly in his introduction that "One of the pleasures of [Schwartz's] letters is his voice: he was a great conversationalist, and next to hearing his conversation, his letters come closest to capturing the raconteur." Schwartz's voice engages us from the start. His earliest letters date from the autumn of 1931, when he was a brand-new, seventeen-year-old, Eliot-mad freshman at the University of Wisconsin, desperately fixated on becoming a great writer and thrilled to be at an institution whose library "has files of the *Criterion, Dial, Bookman*—fourteen volumes of Pascal, and Pound, Eliot, H. Crane, Kenneth Burke, even." His correspondent is a high-school friend named Julian Sawyer, an aspiring homosexual Dadaist who (as James Atlas tells us in his compelling 1977 biography, *Delmore Schwartz: The Life of an*

1 *Letters of Delmore Schwartz,* edited by Robert Phillips; Ontario Review Press, 416 pages, $24.95; and *Randall Jarrell's Letters: An Autobiographical and Literary Selection,* edited by Mary Jarrell; Houghton Mifflin, 560 pages, $29.95.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

American Poet) was "pathetic in his adoration of Delmore." When Julian writes him a *billet doux* in verse, Schwartz (who addresses Julian as "my jewel, my plague") responds by launching into Eliotic lit-crit: "Maybe I 'stir' the soul, the imagination—but everyone does, to the true sensibility." He is pretentious, patronizing, yet oddly touching, bragging to Julian that

> an intellectual group is around me, looks toward me . . . . [I] am the kind of influence . . . that I do not want to be: everyone (the nine or ten) is reading Spinoza. I purpose a cleavage, that I may entirely devote myself to the clouds (such forms, I mean), Georgia O'Keeffe, the Picasso black storms, and the Wordsworthian lake, and walks. (Such is the pomposity of my soul.)

Such indeed! He is the sort of student that professors think they want until they get one, refusing to write an examination on Stephen Vincent Benét and doing Valéry instead because "I could not permit my mind to be profaned by such intellectual whorishness." The plain style never had such an enemy. Instead of saying that he wants to see the sun rise, Schwartz (anticipating the manner of his mature poems and stories) says, "I desire to go out and walk East, and see the light translate the world to morning." Yet there is a sincerity, a seriousness here; the teenager of these letters has a genuine love of the true, the good, and the beautiful; he craves virtue. "Love God alone," he implores Julian, and is not kidding.

After his year at Wisconsin, Schwartz returned East, where he studied philosophy under Sidney Hook at NYU, and (over a weekend in July of 1935, when he was twenty years old) wrote a story called "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities." The story—published two years later, to great acclaim, in the first issue of the Rahv-Phillips *Partisan Review*—was Schwartz's *entrée* into New York literary circles. Before long he was appearing regularly in places like *The Southern Review* and *Poetry,* and was addressing his bossy, hectoring letters not to Julian Sawyer but to Allen Tate, Ezra Pound, and the like. "You seem," he tells Pound, "to have slowed up"—to have lost, that is, the feel for the literary scene; this is a shame, for "you used to ride the 'age'; if not for you, I would certainly have little notion of what it means to be caught up in a period of time, moved by it and attempting to move it." The audacity! But his last letter to Pound is truly admirable: having read the just-published, anti-Semitic *Guide to Kulchur,* Schwartz writes its author to "resign as one of your most studious and faithful admirers."

Schwartz's great year was 1938. He married a young woman named Gertrude Buckman, and New Directions published his first book, an engaging collection of poetry, fiction, verse, and drama entitled, after the story, *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities.* The reviews were mostly ecstatic—largely, it is clear in retrospect, because the book validated a certain conception of poetry. "What is in this book," wrote Mark Van Doren in *The Kenyon Review,* "is more important than anything personal could be." George Marion O'Donnell ventured in *Poetry* that "no first book of this decade in American poetry has been more authoritative or more significant than this one." Authoritative, impersonal: this was the closest thing to a new T. S. Eliot that the critics had seen in a dog's age. By the end of 1938, Schwartz was indisputably the leading poet of his generation.

But by the end of 1939, things had already begun to sour. The turning point was the publication of Schwartz's translation of Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell.* The critics savaged it, and sales were poor. Schwartz's next two books—his verse play *Shenandoah* (1941) and the awful first installment of his never-completed poetic *magnum opus, Genesis,* Book One (1943)—did not fare much better. All of this hurt Schwartz deeply, and it shows in the letters: if those written before *A Season in Hell* suggest an incomparably buoyant, busy, involved young man, those written afterward are the work of a writer increasingly despondent, alone, at loose ends. His self-assured pose disappears, to be replaced at times by a torturous self-doubt

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

("perhaps," he writes Robert Lowell after venturing an opinion on a story by Jean Stafford, "I am at fault as a reader"). Year by year, his enthusiasm for the literary life gives way to cynicism ("I received a kind of state visit from the Kazins. It was very literary . . . .") and, finally, indifference. His letters begin to contain references to bouts of drinking, to spells of "nervous depression," and to "the moral chaos in my soul." "In my youth," he writes Blackmur, "I thought that Life was Shakespearean, but it becomes more and more obvious to me that it is Dostoyevskian." For months at a time he is unable to do any serious creative work at all. In a letter to Philip Rahv he explains that he has tried to write a book review for *The Partisan Review* but has been "unable to get through a page"; and he writes to Van Doren that "I still have no hope of any early return to being articulate." Helpless to do anything else, he pours his solitary despair into one letter after another. To Blackmur: "It is lonely, everyone is gone into the world of the night and I alone sit lingering here . . . ." To Gertrude (who divorced him in 1944): "We all go into the dark." To Lowell: "'Tis bitter chill and I am sick at heart, for I feel as if I were one thousand years of age. I feel as ugly as yonder shoes. And yet as Lady Montagu said on her deathbed, 'It all has been most interesting.' But this does not belong in a letter."

And so it went. During the Forties and Fifties he taught at Harvard, worked for *Partisan Review,* published two books of mediocre stories and two volumes of poetry (including his Bollingen Prize-winning *Summer Knowledge: New and Selected Poems*), and married and divorced again. As he grew less and less productive, he became, in Atlas's words, an "impresario of journals and committees"—poetry editor for *The New Republic,* reader for New Directions, consultant to *Perspectives USA* and *Diogenes.* He was also (thanks largely, no doubt, to greater and greater doses of Dexedrine, Seconal, and alcohol) increasingly subject to the tortures of what Atlas calls "the manic-depressive roller coaster." From the time his second wife left him in 1957 to his death in 1966 he led an essentially nomadic and solitary life, teaching at UCLA one summer and at Syracuse University from 1962 to 1965, and residing the rest of the time in seedy New York hostelries; this was the decade of psychotic tantrums, broken furniture, and state hospitals.

The letters of the last fifteen or so years paint a fascinating, painfully human portrait of a gifted man at war with encroaching madness. "I've put off writing you repeatedly," he tells Meyer Schapiro in 1952, "because what I wanted to say was that I've been sunk for months in the worst part of the manic-depressive disorder which does not show much on the surface, but makes it an ordeal for me to see anyone . . . . During the last few days I've begun to break out of the longest depressed period I can remember." If the depressed periods immobilized Schwartz, the manic periods occasioned some peculiar samples of Delmorean wit. In 1954, for instance, he shares a very un-Eliotic literary judgment with Catherine Carver: "my impression, for what it's worth, is that Gaddis has real genius, but that his novel [*The Recognitions*] reads at times as if Ronald Firbank and Thomas Wolfe were Siamese twins who had written a novel to prove that Truman Capote and William Faulkner ought to become converted to Catholicism." A year later he lists some of "Schwartz's Paradoxes" for John Crowe Ransom: "There are more scapegoats than goats. There are more good book clubs than good books. There are more poems than trees. There are more poets than poems (and the converse is also true, at times). The world is a great success precisely because it is at once a prairie oyster, a white elephant, and a gift horse." One wonders what Ransom made of this.

Randall Jarrell's Letters is, by comparison, sedate. The first dozen letters—which take us, much too rapidly, through Jarrell's early and mid-twenties (he was born in May 1914, five months after Schwartz)—are all addressed to mentors like Robert Penn Warren

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and Allen Tate and are devoted largely to superficial and polite discussions of poems Jarrell would like to publish, books he wishes to review, teaching jobs he wants to secure. It isn't the most exciting of beginnings. One reads on, following Jarrell from Vanderbilt University, through teaching stints in Texas and Ohio and a hitch in the Air Force, to his final berth in the English department of the Women's College of Greensboro, North Carolina—and one realizes all too late that these letters are not going to be revealing in the way Schwartz's are. Jarrell is a member of the "How are you, I am fine" school of letter writing, so full of charming anecdotes about other people's children (like Schwartz, he never had any) and animals (like Schwartz, he doted on his pet cat), and so quick with his opinions about new books and old academics, that it takes a while to recognize that he is not really telling us much. Not only does he not pour out his heart: he seems never to have written a letter while angry, upset, or (except for the last year of his life) unusually depressed. To a reader unfamiliar with Jarrell's life and poetry, the man would undoubtedly come across as supremely well-balanced, a paragon of emotional stability. (And rather dull.) There is no sign, *none,* that a nervous breakdown is in the offing, a suicide waiting to happen.

Only when he is talking literature does Jarrell turn provocative. Most of his opinions—at least the most memorable—are negative ones. Writing from Princeton to his second wife, Mary, in 1952, he describes a lecture by Kenneth Burke as "so bad it was almost feeble-minded; so extravagantly mechanical and verbose and senseless and full of absolutely irrelevant free association that you felt a band of robbers had made up the speech and were *making* him deliver it, to his own disgrace, with a machine-gun trained on him." And in 1943 he writes his first wife, Mackie, that:

> Schwartz's *Genesis* is just awful: I wouldn't dare write a line about it anywhere, I'd be too embarrassed. He puts in a page (of the history

Cahiers du Cinéma

The 1950s: Neo-Realism, Hollywood, New Wave

Edited by Jim Hillier

The selections in this volume are drawn from the colorful first decade of *Cahiers,* the most prestigious and influential film journal ever published. Many of the journal's major contributors and theorists—Godard, Truffaut, Rohmer, Rivette, Chabrol—were to become some of France's most important film directors and leaders of the New Wave.

Harvard Film Studies $22.50

◆

Contemplating Music

Challenges to Musicology

Joseph Kerman

This book establishes the place of music firmly in the mainstream of modern intellectual history. It is the first full-scale account of ideas and ideologies in music over the past forty years, a period during which virtually every aspect of music was transformed. $16.00

◆

Selections from Cultural Writings

Antonio Gramsci
Edited and Introduced by David Forgacs and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith
Translated by William Boelhower

Antonio Gramsci is now seen as the most significant Marxist thinker since Lenin. This is the first English translation of his writings on culture, edited from his *Prison Notebooks.* $20.00

◆

Harvard University Press

79 Garden Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> of a Jewish immigrant family) of prose so flat, abstract, and completely dull as to seem part of that old story with the numbered paragraphs in the *Kenyon*; then he has anonymous ghosts of the dead make long moral philosophical verse comments for two pages; then a page more of prose, two more of verse; and so on for 250 pages, with two volumes more to come. The great dead are, not enthusiastic but *enthused,* about the inane story flat as "The Loves of the Triangles," and act as if it were a perfect gospel, the ideal text for the final endless commentary. It's a sad affair; to read it through you need resolution, just resolution—more than even a soldier has, if I can call myself that.

"Give me a little précis of Delmore Schwartz in private life," he writes Lowell two years later. "That a person of his taste and intelligence should write the stories he does—half the sentences would serve as textbook models of banal and ingenuous vulgarity—is extraordinary, and must be symptomatic of some queer segmentation of his personal being into an objective part with taste and another part with nothing but adolescent self-absorption."

Mary Jarrell, the poet's second wife and editor of the letters, has placed commentaries—some brief, some over a page long—after most of the letters. In addition to identifying people, places, and literary works mentioned in the text, and filling in the chronological gaps between letters, these glosses contain a good deal of primary material—anecdotes about Jarrell and friends, quotations from critics' praise of his work, and the like. Indeed, the book is less a plain and simple collection of letters than it is an oddly structured memoir. Some of Mrs. Jarrell's offerings are not only useful but intriguing; she narrates in detail, for instance, a revealing, funny conversation in which a fogbound Robert Lowell plays my-family's-better-than-yours with her daughter (by a first marriage)—exactly the sort of thing one would never find in Jarrell's letters. But most of the time, Mrs. Jarrell simply overdoes it. She devotes most of a page to a discussion of B. H. Haggin's musical tastes, spends four rather long sentences telling us who Edmund Wilson is, tells us far more than we need to know about North Carolina campus politics and what the Warrens' house looked like and who wore a fur coat to the poetry festival. Her commentaries interrupt the flow of the letters, making it difficult to lose oneself in Jarrell's voice; also, they tend to give the book the feel of a family album. This is not a particularly bad thing, except that as a result one cannot help but wonder about its objectivity. That Mrs. Jarrell refers to herself throughout in the third person—as if the commentary had been written by some nameless scholar, or maybe a computer—only makes the format all the more disconcerting.

It is unfortunate, too, that just when Mrs. Jarrell might be able to shed some light, she fails to satisfy. I am speaking of her account of the last year of Jarrell's life. As she describes it, he turned fifty, suddenly got depressed (she carefully notes that the doctor found "no previous treatment for depression and no medical history of manic-depressive psychosis"), and was given a "mood-elevating drug." In her subsequent glosses she strongly implies—without ever saying so explicitly—that the failure of Jarrell's physician to cut back the dosage of this drug was the reason why Jarrell soon changed his personality, losing his sweet, gentle disposition and turning tense and mean. His behavior—as she describes it—brings Schwartz to mind: Jarrell became a "holy terror" to fellow teachers, held his students spellbound, tipped a waitress fifteen hundred dollars, and got up to introduce Hannah Arendt at a faculty gathering, and "with an ashen face, glittering eyes, and a look of haggard vivacity, talked for twenty minutes about meeting Johnny Unitas, the Colt quarterback."

Finally he was "admitted to Memorial Hospital in Chapel Hill for rest and observation." He stayed five months (during which he attempted suicide), was released, and four months later was struck and killed by a car on a highway near the Greensboro

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

campus. Mrs. Jarrell spends a page arguing (not very convincingly) that it was not suicide. Nowhere in the pages covering this year-long debacle does she even attempt to answer the question uppermost in the reader's mind: *What happened?* Why in heaven's name did Jarrell, after a lifetime of putative sanity, all at once become a basket case? Mrs. Jarrell would have us believe it was purely a case of fiftieth-birthday blues plus an unfortunate pharmacological phenomenon—wrong drug, wrong dosage. But Jarrell's entire poetic *oeuvre* stands as evidence to the contrary. One cannot help but surmise that Jarrell had a well-oiled defense mechanism in place—by means of which he was able to keep the expression of his profound inner turmoil confined entirely to his poetry—and that, for some reason, it broke down. A letter written to Margaret Marshall years before the breakdown would seem to support this hypothesis. "I don't know whether you'd guess it," he writes her, "but I have an even, cheerful, and optimistic disposition: what I write is therapeutically the opposite, I guess." His refusal, moreover, to be of help during Lowell's manic periods—or even to visit Lowell in mental hospitals—also seems worth noting; this strange behavior suggests that Jarrell did not like to be reminded, by the sight of his friend's mind in chaos, of the precariousness of his own emotional stability.

What the world needs now, obviously, is a biography—an *objective* one, of Jarrell. In the past two or three years, almost every other gap in the biographical literature on this circle of poets has been filled in: aside from the letters of Schwartz and Jarrell, we've seen shoe-box-sized lives of Lowell and Berryman, an elegant memoir by Eileen Simpson, and enlightening recollections in the autobiographical writings of William Barrett and other contemporaries. It may well be, of course, that these two volumes of correspondence simply mark the latest stage in the advance of yet another literary-circle personality cult—a cross, perhaps, between Bloomsbury and the Beats. Then again, the letters might actually encourage readers to take a first brave look at the best of their authors' work: the poems collected in Schwartz's *Summer Knowledge*; Jarrell's moving verse in *Little Friend, Little Friend* (1945) and *Losses* (1948); his agony-ridden (but exquisitely understated) lyrics in *The Woman at the Washington Zoo* (1960) and *The Lost World* (1966); his novel *Pictures at an Institution* (1954); and a number of critical essays by both writers. But the value of *Letters of Delmore Schwartz* and *Randall Jarrell's Letters* does not rest entirely in their potential ability to draw attention to their authors' poetry. Both books are of considerable worth in themselves, if only because they constitute the truest records we yet have of two remarkable lives that were consecrated to the art that Schwartz refers to (in a poem called "The Kingdom of Poetry") as "an everlasting Ark,/An omnibus containing, bearing and begetting all the mind's animals." Lives have been devoted to worse things.

Strindberg's ghosts

Olof Lagercrantz August Strindberg. Translated by Anselm Hollo.[1] Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 400 pages, $25.50

reviewed by Vernon Young

"The unhappiest moment of his life was the hour of his birth." So reads the first sentence of a biography of August Strindberg published in the Forties, with its then familiar inference that Strindberg's existence had begun in deprivation and was resumed under lifelong persecution. In recent years, however, an increasingly revised opinion has refuted any conclusion arrived at by accepting Strindberg at his own estimate. Olof

1 I want to commend Anselm Hollo's translation of Lagercrantz's book. Swedish looks easy to translate and thereby presents a problem. The syntax is far less intricate than ours and the vocabulary is deficient in synonyms. To convey a style demands constant resourcefulness.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lagercrantz's biography of the man (it is not primarily a critique of the work) is the most enlightening which has appeared; to begin with, the author acknowledges that "any biographer of Strindberg must in a sense protect himself from his subject: for every phase of his life, Strindberg decided how he wanted to be understood and deliberately created a persona for himself."

One of his most deliberate creations was indeed "the hour of his birth." In 1896, at the age of forty-seven, he wrote from Paris to a Theosophist friend in Stockholm that he had been born under the sign of the Ram, which represented Sacrifice; his reward for his life's work: "to be butchered. Every success a consequence of suffering, every trace of happiness tainted by dirt; every encouragement a mockery, every good deed punished by crucifixion." When he wrote these words Strindberg, while not at the moment popular in Sweden, was the highly acclaimed author of *The Father, Miss Julie,* and *Master Olof* and his Parisian self-exile was being sustained with funds provided by a wealthy patron of the arts in Göteborg. Lagercrantz, supported by more detail than previous histories have included, reveals the 1896 lament as nonsense and questions the autobiographical complaints Strindberg had earlier published in Sweden.

Usually regarded as a self-evident source of his boyhood and youth, *The Serving-Maid's Son* (1885), a piece of self-aggrandizement in which Strindberg endowed his mother with a low social origin in order to boast how far he had risen above it, is not to be relied on for anything but incidental observations of Stockholm (hierarchical and unsanitary) in the 1860s and 1870s. In Lagercrantz's opinion, the personal history is "either useless or downright misleading." Strindberg's mother had been for a short period a servant, beneath *her* station, but when Strindberg was growing up she and her husband were of the medium-income bourgeoisie. However thwarted Strindberg may have felt in his efforts to achieve intellectual independence, he was raised in comfort and was *well fed*—something to be kept in mind if we try to read his last "chamber" play, *The Pelican,* as an autobiographical slice of life. His mother was subservient in the household, that's for certain, but this was customary in an era of suffocating male chauvinism. She died when Strindberg was thirteen and his father promptly married the governess, who could scarcely have been described as a servant either. No details of Strindberg's precise relationship with his stepmother are forthcoming in Lagercrantz's recital; the inference is that he was more charmed than not by her; she was attractive and only by seven years his senior. That this is the most important clue to Strindberg's radical and lifelong conflict with women will, I trust, be clear in what follows.

Unlike Dostoevsky, Strindberg did not resent the crowded home atmosphere in which, with six brothers and sisters, he lived. After attending two schools where he bitterly missed the amenities of his family circle, he was sent to the Stockholm Lyceum, a private institution where instruction was more liberal. None of his brothers or sisters was given this privilege. Lagercrantz insists that Strindberg's dream of a happy existence on earth was, *au fond,* father, mother, and children around a well-appointed table. To that idyll he remained faithful all his days and it may well be that, since he proved personally incapable of establishing it in his own vicinity, he chose, with his native perversity, to depict life as an eternal repetition of internecine relationships: imprisonment within the family, within marriage, within society and, finally, on earth.

His perennial embrace of his less well-furnished fellow prisoners was equally contradictory. While it is undeniable that he felt sympathy for the underprivileged at the moment he expressed it, his extended treatment of the subject was confused when it wasn't expedient. By selective quotation Strindberg can be made to appear a friend to man (an unsmiling one) but his collaborative protests were frequently rubbish. Around 1872 he published a number of pamphlets in which he contended that all the ills of society arose from division of labor, where-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by a man was incarcerated in his occupation, often imposed on him, forever. Given the static condition of nineteenth-century European social conditions there is a half-truth in this assertion, but Strindberg's pursuit of the subject brought him no nearer to the whole. He was detoured by arguments reaching him from the Continent in that standard form of seductive Rousseauism, the corruption of the natural man, which has served nearly every anti-intellectual romantic to this day. During 1885, when he was badly displaced professionally, so he thought, and certainly in dire financial straits, he visited Italy (Rome and Venice), saying afterward, "Expected little, found even less." Lagercrantz, without quoting him directly, assures us that "The relics of antiquity and the Renaissance which he saw filled him with revulsion, as they represented a dominant culture built on slave labour." One wonders if Strindberg was the first among eminent visitors to publish such an imbecile judgment, which surfaced again in our Sixties. He must have known better and he must have known that the division of labor, broadly speaking, was a necessary condition by which social mankind had channeled its energies, but at the hour it did not suit his hampered convenience to recognize it. Railways, he raved, were unnecessary luxuries; so were telephones and, of all things, the compass! (He didn't *want* to know where he stood!) While purporting to believe that the writer was the only citizen able to see clearly the shortcomings of organized society, he dismissed almost in the same breath the virtues of literacy. His reason: a tenant farmer he knew, although illiterate, was a valuable member of society.

It is not surprising that he began to reverse his deprecations of an elite in 1886 when the publisher Bonnier canceled a debt of eight thousand kronor (accumulated advances) and when, as a result of sundry letters he had written advertising his impecunity, a collection by friends in Stockholm presented him with 3680 francs. After travelling extensively throughout France, allegedly collecting material for a study of the peasantry, he settled in Germany, near Lake Constance. At this point, he became as authoritarian in his views as he had before been populist. He was being obedient, no doubt, to the claims of that terrifying play, *The Father,* which he was just then conceiving. He seems to have been unable, in his contemporary drama, to imagine a protagonist (male or female) unrelated to himself. To create the Captain convincingly he found it imperative to *be* the Captain, and assume the frame of mind to which a sternly disciplined cavalry officer would have been conditioned. The adverse critic of a class-power society in Sweden was now transformed into an admirer of Bismarck, rejoicing, incidentally, to find that in Germany women were not permitted to study in universities, a source of pleasure no doubt inspired by his ten years of increasingly disputatious marriage to Siri von Essen. *The Father* was the first, and if the most powerful, the most depressing, of those masterpieces of domestic malice that include *Miss Julie* and *The Dance of Death.*

The Captain, a figure of physical health and moral blamelessness, is not only a military man but also an amateur scientist (which brings him into line with one of Strindberg's most whimsical pretensions). His wife, Laura, strong-willed and insidious, wants their daughter to become a painter, against his preferred choice for her of a teaching career. From Strindberg's odd point of view at that moment, Laura aimed at turning the girl into an upper-class parasite, or worse, a Bohemian, in opposition to his laudable desire for her to marry and dutifully instruct her children in what she herself has learned. A mortal combat ensues, with Laura undermining the Captain's mental health by leading him to suspect that he is not his daughter's authentic father. Driven to a frenzy of desperation by his wife's taunts and his own doubts, he throws a burning kerosene lamp at her. In the final scene he is a certified madman, coaxed rather than forced into a straitjacket by his physician and by the wet nurse of his childhood. He has exchanged one uniform for another.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Since Strindberg's despotic alliance with Siri von Essen, inverted in the action of this play, provided him with so many other creative lies, it is appropriate to focus on his first acquaintance with her and her husband, Baron Carl Gustaf Wrangel. Incredibly, when he met the couple in 1875, they were living in the same apartment in which, for three years, Strindberg had lived, with his stepmother and the family. Although Freud's oedipal theory had not yet been made public, the substance of its formulation was conspicuously available in *Hamlet,* which Strindberg, always prepared to magnify and dramatize a coincidence, may well have enlisted. At any rate, Lagercrantz believes he was alert to the analogy: he had entered his parental home "in order to kill his father, represented by Wrangel, and to marry his mother or, alternatively, stepmother." This is no idle speculation. Wrangel, scion of a distinguished military lineage, held a commission in Sweden's most prestigious regiment, whose commander was the King himself. During the subsequent dissolution of Wrangel's marriage with Siri, easily assented to because he was pursuing an affair with her cousin, Strindberg felt humiliated by the indulgence extended to him by this lordly member of the military establishment. Ten years later, in *The Father,* whatever of the Captain was not Strindberg was no doubt a recollection of the Baron, whom he could now destroy symbolically.

Strindberg claimed to have discovered, in a blinding flash, at a performance of *The Father,* that he had always *contrived* the life situations he needed in order to "rectify" his literary material! That the discovery did not in the least deter him from repeatedly thereafter involving others in his compulsion of the hour reveals him as something of a monster. And his persecution of Siri von Essen for thirteen years was probably the most monstrous of these episodes, as it was the most fruitful; from it he derived characterizations for his so-called novel, *A Fool's Apology* (known also as *A Madman's Defense*), for numerous short stories, and for at least two plays, notably *The Father* and *Miss Julie.* As grotesque as it may sound, one has to face the probability that he consciously married a mother-figure so that the incest taboo would forever prohibit him from enjoying her. In any case, all the evidence suggests that the principal obsession for which Strindberg is famous, his grinding misogyny, preceded his alliance with Siri, which he then used in a crescendo of vilification to nourish a monomania on which he was already feeding.

At the outset he professed to agree with Ibsen's plea for the liberalization of women, especially for those who, like Siri, were potentially creative (she had a first-rate singing voice and nursed a frustrated ambition to become an actress). When Strindberg realized that he had a Nora under his roof who had every intention of emulating Ibsen's heroine, he changed his tune radically. Thereafter, with mounting vehemence, in his literature as in his correspondence, he pursued an unsparing arraignment of womankind at large and of Siri von Essen face to face. Very thinly disguised, Siri was delivered to the public gaze—in *A Fool's Apology* and in the sequence of stories that make up *Marrying*—as "a painter of no talent, an alcoholic who neglected her children [the daughters of Baron Wrangel and of Strindberg], as crude, heartless, cynical, and lacking in the least trace of affection for the writer who was slaving away to keep the family—her husband."

By the time he had completed *Marrying,* publication of which landed him in court (not for slandering women but for incidentally blaspheming against the Christian religion), Strindberg had reached a level of denunciation unattained by any writer since Swift.

> I want to exhort the lawmakers to carefully consider the consequences of granting civic rights to semi-apes, inferior creatures, sick children, sick and insane thirteen times a year at the time of menstruation, completely out of their minds during pregnancy, and irresponsible during the rest of their life, unconscious

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> criminals, criminal, instinctively malicious animals who do not even know that that is what they are.

Not all of this nauseating invective actually reached Siri herself. The passage just quoted is from a version of *Marrying* which, according to Lagercrantz, was but recently recovered among the papers of Edvard Munch in Oslo. But enough reached her at a time when she was coping with uterine problems as a result of her latest childbirth. From then on she justifiably watched Strindberg closely for signs of complete dementia. To that, of course, he retaliated by accusing her of forcing him into an insane asylum. "And there indeed," remarks Lagercrantz triumphantly, "is the subject matter of *The Father*."

With the help of a "psychoanalytic profile" which he does not identify—he names only the author, Theodore Lidz—Lagercrantz calls our attention to the concealed pattern of self-recrimination that lurks in this harrowing and repellent play. The Captain confesses that in his violent quarrels with Laura he suffers most when instead of shouting back at him she mollifies him, like a mother. In the last scene, as the Captain, seemingly insane or perhaps feigning madness,[2] is enticed into the straitjacket by snatches of fairy-tale lore and baby talk, the wet nurse is disarming him with the same tactics as those used by Laura. When his captivity is complete, Laura tells him that the fateful events have proceeded along lines that he himself has laid down and that before God and her conscience she feels innocent. A curious speech in this context, we must agree; if it refers to Strindberg's own marriage, it is a grudging admission that Siri was not guilty of the charges he had leveled, since *she* had proceeded along lines that Strindberg himself had set down.

Wheels within wheels. The insight with which Strindberg could see through his own degrading strategies, subtilizing them as theatrical elements but failing to abandon them in actuality, is incredible. That a writer purges himself of his torments by expressing them on the page (or on the stage) is a belief not ratified by Strindberg's example. *The Father* was staged in 1887, followed by the shock of recognition I have alluded to above, yet for the remaining years of his marriage to Siri he hounded her with accusations of sexual infidelity which he tried in vain to prove by writing sly letters to friends, soliciting clues in the pretense of defending Siri from gossip. At the hour of their divorce, in order to gain custody of his children (heaven knows why; he had no serious intention of becoming a model father), he tried recklessly to link her in a lesbian relationship with a woman named Marie David, whom he had already pilloried in *A Fool's Apology* as a vampire, an alcoholic, and a pervert. Marie David countersued and Strindberg was eventually forced to concede defeat.

Theodore Lidz found the provenance of Strindberg's mania in latent homosexuality. Perhaps I have read Lagercrantz's explanations unclearly but I am not satisfied by the demonstration. For me, the incest taboo in Strindberg is so powerful that it takes precedence over every other suggestion. That both suppressions can be harbored in the same personality is of course likely and Strindberg's life-in-art and art-in-life is a tangled web. One thing is certain, whatever the ancestry: that Strindberg had an undying need to *inflict* and when he was provoked by an insult, real or fancied, to his sexual proclivities his reaction was volcanic and the fury of his language beyond his control to abate. While engaged to Frida Uhl (another liberated and personally ambitious woman whom he unwisely married) he had a brief affair with Dagny Juel, a notorious Norwegian beauty who had been Edvard Munch's mistress. She rejected Strindberg in three weeks with the rumored explanation that he was too old—and too corpulent! In the ensuing months Strindberg, in a blind rage, described Dagny (whether in letters, tavern

2 As played by Lars Hanson in his superb performance of 1953, which I saw revived in the early Sixties, the Captain was clearly, one may say contentedly, mad!

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

INCHARDI

Novels by J. Inchardi
$15 each

Lines On The Death Of A Fisherman

Three Jews In A Tub

Dreamship

Yurros

A Paper Toy

Intercurse

Jehovah Mafioso

Saturn Maru

Drek Shlak

Om Budsman

Order from **Sirius Books**
P.O. Box 177
Freeport, Maine 04032

talk, or fiction Lagercrantz fails to make clear) as "a whore, a reptile, a rotten cadaver . . . a vampire, whose embrace killed, and a witch, who had to be burned at the stake."

His autumnal years, in Stockholm, after 1900, curbed his rancor toward woman in the flesh, without modifying his conviction that she was an inferior being. His third failed marriage, to the actress, Harriet Bosse, was far less turbulent than his previous misalliances and his regrets upon separation from her had touches of pathos. These may well have been histrionic; they did not inhibit his delight upon reading a philosophic study by Otto Weininger entitled *Sex and Character.* Lagercrantz is somewhat vague about the contents of this work but implies that it was a misogynist's farewell; the author committed suicide. Strindberg sent a wreath to Weininger's funeral and promptly wrote an article inspired by Weininger but uninspired by any radical departure from his own inveterate thesis.

> According to the latest analysis, a woman's love consists of 50 per cent rut and 50 per cent hatred . . . . Quite apart from differences of taste, inclination, opinion and so on, one finds that when a woman loves a man, she also hates him; hates him because she feels tied to him, and inferior to him. There is no continuous flow in her love, but a continual reversal of polarity, a perennial alternation of current . . . .

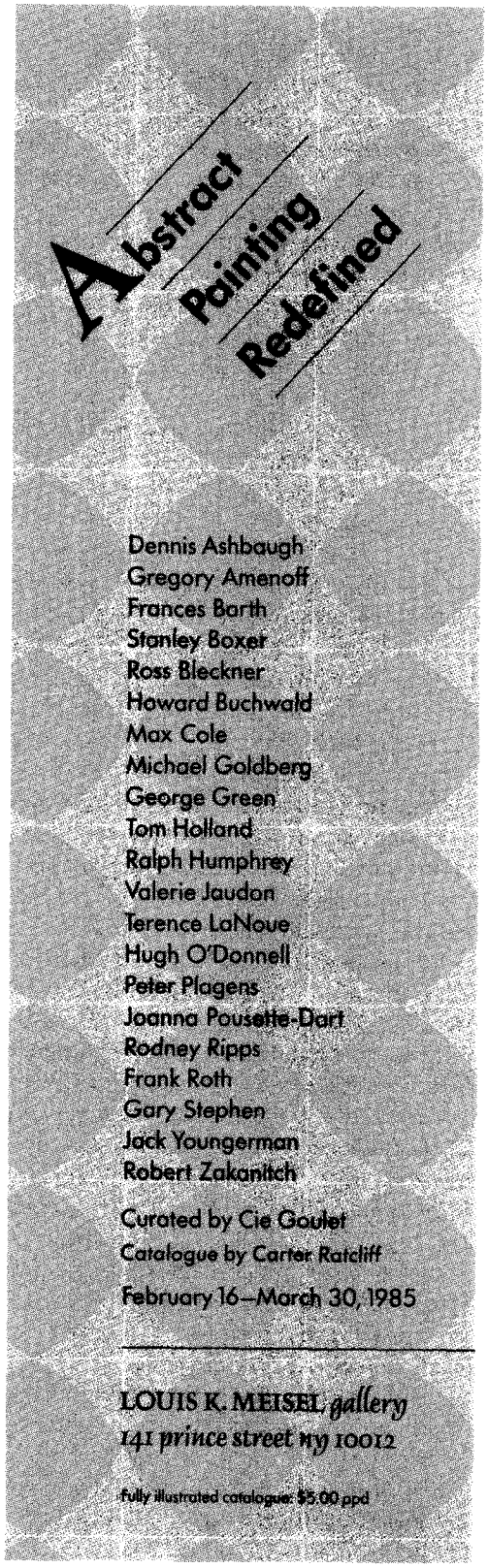
Not as venomous, perhaps, as the early variants but for all that banal. Yet his most astonishing reversion in these years is *The Pelican,* last of his chamber plays, an altogether baffling item in the chronology. From the plays that preceded it, *A Dream Play* and *The Ghost Sonata,* (didactic tone poems, they might be called), *The Pelican* departs radically in style and structure. *A Dream Play* has always appealed to enemies of the well-made drama, as well as to those who prefer chatter about the Riddle of Life to adversary situations carried out in the heat of the day; the play is a disintegration

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

product, with musical undertones, imprecise and suggestive. As an index to the multiple ghosts stalking the corridors of Strindberg's mind, it fascinates. I saw it a number of times in Sweden and was usually frustrated by my suspicion that because it was about everything it was substantially about nothing—except the winter of Strindberg's discontent: a chronicle in fragments of his nostalgia, his animosities, his obsession with signs and portents, his unsettled will to resignation.

By contrast, *The Pelican* is categorical and realistic—on the surface, at least. The scenario, as lurid as any by a gifted playwright before Eugene O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms,* treads so closely on farce that few directors, even in Sweden, where they are susceptible to the over-serious, venture to stage it. The Mother, who dominates the action, is derived from the unnourishing Cook in *The Ghost Sonata*; she has driven her husband into the grave and is half-starving her son and daughter, gorging on the choice morsels herself. When her daughter is ill, she attends an operetta (for some reason a mortal frivolity in Strindberg's credo); believing herself attractive, she makes lewd advances to her son-in-law. At the climax, the drunken son sets fire to the house, Mother leaps into the flames, brother and sister clasp each other in an incestuous embrace.

I can understand why Evert Sprinchorn, in his book *Strindberg as Dramatist* (1982), sees the play as "a domestic Götterdämmerung that announces the bankruptcy of the family as an institution and the end of bourgeois drama." It didn't, and it wasn't, but it could have done and it might have been! I am not to be imposed upon, however, by his description of it as "magnificent dramaturgy" and I am struck all of a heap by his comparison of this and the other chamber plays with Beethoven's last quartets. Sprinchorn's tendency to replace skepticism with adulation is no help when we try to solve such problems as are raised by *The Pelican.* Symbolic and sociologically comprehensive the play may be if you can stand back far enough, but this leaves us with the odd



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

explanation offered by Strindberg of its internal justifications.

As reported by Lagercrantz, Strindberg let it be known that the monstrous mother was a portrait of his sister, Anna von Philp. She and her husband Hugo had been models for his discordant couple in *The Dance of Death,* in which the blame for an unendurable marriage was attributed largely to the husband. Hugo von Philp had since died and evidently Strindberg wanted to alter his verdict. Anna stayed with Strindberg for a week in 1906 when he was preoccupied with furious complaints over the food served him by a succession of cooks. Anna joined that succession and he shortly ordered her from the house.

On the face of things, it scarcely seems possible that Strindberg could have contrived the House-of-Usher claptrap and the symbolic superstructure of *The Pelican* for the sake of fulminating against his sister. She could have been a mere point of departure. All the same, it is more likely that the mother was a composite accusation in Strindberg's long-familiar vein of the unnourishing female (unnourishing and blood-sucking; *vampire* was his favorite apposition for women he detested). At the eleventh hour he wanted to relieve his *actual* mother, or stepmother (it gets so complicated!) of that accusation. Which might account for his displacement of the prominent incest motif from son-mother to brother-sister . . . Or I might be in another part of the forest! Lagercrantz disbelieves in all the hypothetical mothers. In accord with his common-sense conviction that any ambiguous target in the Strindberg oeuvre is likely to be the playwright himself, he sees *The Pelican* as "the most repulsive of all Strindberg's self-portraits. It is *he* who battens on the lives of others; who, while advanced in years, pursues love and forgets his children. It is he who constantly demands the very best in the house and uses all life within the family for his writing." When, in the play, the son reminds his mother: "Father said that if you were tortured on the rack, you would not admit a single error or lie," Strindberg is patently confessing a shortcoming which Karin Smirnoff (his daughter) has confirmed was among his most egregious.

Refreshingly absent from Lagercrantz's biography is the excessive anxiety with which American professors, defending the genius of their choice, have inflated Strindberg's talent and minimized his chill factors. Lagercrantz takes for granted that within the world of theater at the turn of the century Strindberg was indisputably a potent force, without insisting, as Evert Sprinchorn has done, that we should reinstate Strindberg among the great tragedians. This begs a question settled long ago. You cannot invest analytic realism, however oblique, with the timelessness of tragedy. Where there is no magnitude of aspiration there can be no authentically tragic denouement; and aspiration would be an irrelevant source of passion and defeat where, as in Strindberg's drama, the express purpose is not to exalt but to *expose.* Exposure may be calamitous; it may be merely negative; it is an irreversible commitment of our era.

Strindberg, despite the reactionary nature of his manic irresolutions, was a modern man, much to his own astonishment. His best plays are distinguished by their internal consistency and their psychological persuasiveness. They are critical, and criticism—let us not avoid the charge—drives out tragedy. Their integrity is mirthless, yet for all that they are not inflexible. They are *playable*: the balance of their allegiances has been subtly weighed. The extent to which you sympathize with one or another antagonist depends very much on the acuity with which the director of the production you see has grasped the leeway that has been allowed him.

Even so, most of Strindberg's plays are hard to take. As Auden said, our grief is not Greek. It is not Swedish either! The morbid intensity of Strindberg's pious outlook is thoroughly Swedish and the social situation from which it was educed, resembling those of the Victorian period elsewhere, has nonetheless a cast of mind you can only appreciate by trying to live in Sweden today. If the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

order of relationships has been altered by time and social democracy, the *climate* of relationships has changed very little. You have not experienced Strindberg until, in Stockholm, you have emerged from a performance of, let us say, *The Father* or *The Ghost Sonata* or one of those never-ending pilgrimage pieces (e.g., *The Great Highway*) on a cold, dark winter's night when the streets are as devoid of promise as the play was devoid of charm: no café open, no one to talk to if there were, and the prospect of a midnight ride home to your deathly silent sleeping-suburb on the immaculate subway.

There is never a last word on any artist. There is always what seems to be the last word if we agree with whoever pronounced it. For many who read the Lagercrantz biography, the generosity with which he has amplified their knowledge of Strindberg the man will imperil their acceptance of Strindberg the dramatist. Like D. H. Lawrence, who crucially resembled him—the splitting of the self, the identification with Christ, the unfailing spite and the breathtaking defamations—Strindberg commands attention. He resists affection. Among those writers who severally shaped what we call modernism for the first decade of our century (Freud, Hardy, James, Conrad, Ibsen, Chekhov), Strindberg surely was the most inflamed, the most intolerant and intolerable, the least ingratiating, the one among them whom we would have wanted least to know.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notebook

Performance pieces

by Mimi Kramer

There was some really good pool going on at Magoo's in TriBeCa and our names were up next on the chalkboard. It would be hard having to tear ourselves away. Still, duty was duty: around the corner on Franklin Street was an "artistic event" we had to cover.

That was what the young man at the gallery had said when we'd stopped by earlier: "You're here to cover the event?" Not having thought of it in quite those terms, I'd hesitated a second before nodding tentatively. "And when will your review be published?" he persisted. I'd peered at him, taking in the desperate beard, the eager horn-rimmed glasses (Ralph Lauren classic), the white-on-black knit vest patterned loud and heartily with musical notes, and explained as politely as possible that I couldn't make any promises: that depended a little, I said, on how much of an "event" this turned out to be.

He'd leaned back expansively in his chair as though to distance himself from the stacks of leaflets and flyers piled on the table before him. "The deadline is the important thing," he remarked authoritatively, adding in a tone that perfectly matched his vest, "I *teach* journalism, you know."

"I didn't know," I admitted and asked him how far it was to Magoo's.

The occurrence on Franklin Street, *State of Mind/State of the Union,* had been advertised as a "major art event timed to coincide with the Presidential Inauguration and State of the Union Address." Putting together State of Mind . . . was PADD—Political Art Documentation/Distribution—a group describing itself as "a New York City artists' organization working at the juncture of art and society." It was conceived, the press release had said, as

> an "inaugural challenge" by socially concerned artists to express critical views on the state of U.S. culture and politics today and to project "countervisions" for the kind of world they want to help create . . . .

State of Mind/State of the Union would consist of "eight exhibitions, six evenings and an afternoon of performance works, numerous street works," and the creative output of "several hundred visual artists, performers and writers" a good bit of whom (the press release implied) had been commissioned or solicited "specifically for" the occasion.

The game at Magoo's was going fast but not fast enough. It didn't look as though we'd get a chance to play.

"So I told him," the girl at the table behind us was saying to her friend, "I *said*: 'You use Yeats like a weapon . . .'"

My friend Kerry told me to stop looking at the pool table: it was embarrassing her, she said.

"Tell me about this 'event' we're covering," she suggested. "What makes it 'an inaugural challenge?'"

I explained that an important item on the program was to be "a massive Image-Gram

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

campaign directed at the White House." Pulling out the press release, I read:

> Artists from across the nation will send a deluge of Image-Grams to the White House this January to register their opposition to current national policies and to present their visions for the kind of society they would like to see.

"Image-Grams," said Kerry, "Hmn. I can see the president is in for some sleepless nights!"

I continued reading from the press release. The members of PADD, it said, "though widely varied in style and heritage," were "united in a spirit" that was "pro-working people, anti-racist, pro-feminist, internationalist, and anti-war."

Kerry nodded approvingly and said she thought we could go along with all that. "We're against war and racism, aren't we? For workers and women?"

"How about 'internationalist?'"

She shrugged. "That goes without saying. We *love* to travel!"

The gallery was right where we'd left it, the journalism professor still at his post. Greeting us rather effusively, he explained that the upstairs exhibit had no connection with "the event" but invited us to look around anyway before going down to the "performance area." As we moved forward into the small, oozing crowd, he called out gaily, "Enjoy the show!" I looked back at him suspiciously, ready to re-think that vest, but he looked incapable of irony.

The exhibit we encountered upstairs was called "Pink Triangle Not Forgotten. Works by S. K. Duff" and it consisted of lots and lots of multi-media paintings, sculptures, and collages related to the Holocaust, all darkly brooding, all poorly executed, all pretty much the same. In the absence of The Muse, an *idée fixe* seemed to have taken possession of the imagination of S. K. Duff. But precisely what the artist had to say or thought he had to say about The Final Solution (beyond the fact that it bothered him) was a little less clear.

There were paintings with titles like "YES, IT HAPPENED YEARS AGO, BUT AGAIN IN OUR TIME," "TO THY OWN SELF BE TRUE" *(sic),* and "I HAVE SEEN THINGS THAT I CANNOT BEGIN TO DESCRIBE." There were sculptures and exhibits, things in glass cases, bits of maps, old photographs, pieces of bone: "ARTIFACTS" or "UNTOLD STORY EVOLVING IN THREE DIMENSIONS." My favorites were the "alterpieces." That's what it said on the list of titles: "IN MEMORY—alterpiece" or "NIGHT OF THE LONG KNIVES & ROHM: an alterpiece." On the works themselves: "Please kneel before alter," it said. I pointed these out to Kerry and she said the presence of *otherness* was very Lacanian.

The people behind us were talking about computers. I stepped back as though to gain a new insight into "CASTRATION" from a different perspective.

"Now they have a new one," a woman was saying.

"What's it called?" a voice asked eagerly.

"An NMR."

I moved away hoping to catch some more snatches of authentic SoHo gallery conversation.

"That doesn't have anything to do with The Cube, does it?" a girl was asking tentatively.

"Oh, *no*!" Her interlocutor shook his loose curls.

"No," she agreed meekly. It had been a silly thing to say.

Turning, I caught sight of my friend a few feet away and lurched toward her frantically. *"Kerry,"* I hissed, "you're *stepping* on the *exhibit*!"

She looked down and, sure enough, found herself standing in an area set off by a triangle of pink tape. "I thought this was supposed to be performance art," she snarled, but she got out of the exhibit all the same.

In the middle of the triangle was a heap of pine needles with a number of objects placed on top of and around it: an evergreen bough (no longer green), a torn photograph, a dog-tag, some bones. "What's that, I wonder," I said pointing to something lying

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

beside the pile of pine needles. We peered more closely. It looked mysteriously like a piece of red gelatin, the kind used in stage lighting. I said as much and crouched down to get a closer look. It really did look like a piece of red lighting gel. "I wonder what it's meant to signify. Blood?" I glanced up at Kerry.

"Oh, I see." I stood up. "Never mind."

"What do you think it is?" Kerry wanted to know.

"I think it's a piece of lighting gel that fell off that spotlight," I said. "Come on, let's go downstairs."

The performance area seemed to be filling up nicely. Already most of the seats were taken and there were fifteen or twenty people sitting docilely on the floor. A fair portion of the audience seemed to know one another. A woman in a Fun Fur Coat, for instance, came in announcing her birthday and word quickly travelled through the ranks that Amelia (or someone) had just turned thirty-two.

One fellow in the front row was preparing to videotape the entire proceeding. He had a bald patch and close-cropped hair giving out at the back on the sort of single strand you keep long in case you go somewhere where you need to wear a braid. I liked his blouse: a pattern of brick walls with *Défense d'afficher* signs all over and, on the back in black spray paint, the single message, *"Délire."* I thought that was pretty interesting.

Kicking off the evening was Irving Wexler, one of PADD's founding members, a man somewhat advanced in years, who took the opportunity to welcome us all. If nothing else his introduction established PADD as an institution of few words. He reiterated that PADD was an artists' organization formed to provide artists with an organized relationship to society. He repeated that these artists were united in a spirit that was pro-women, pro-workingman, anti-war, etc. He reminded us that we were there to see a multi-media art event conceived as a forum for socially concerned artists to express their opposition etc. We were, he said, about to see a number of "performance pieces" by "well-known artists."

The first piece, entitled "Giveaway," was by Jimmie Durham. An Indian who had been sitting on the floor against a wall stood up and came before us. Introducing himself, he explained that he was going to treat us to "a traditional Indian giveaway ceremony" and the first order of business, evidently, was to burn some cedar wood. In the heavy, nasal monotone of the self-consciously morose, Jimmie Durham explained that the cedar-burning ritual was to "get us in a good spirit" and "to chase away the evil spirits."

Rather abruptly, he turned his back on the audience and uttered three brief sobs, leaving the audience somewhat taken aback. He turned to face us again, explaining that now he was going to burn the cedar wood. This he proceeded to do—only he had a little trouble keeping it lit. He went through six or seven matches before the branches actually caught; but when he waved a large fan made entirely of feathers in the general direction of the branches, the cedar wood gave off a nice, smoky fragrance.

For a while the artist walked around the "performance area" waving his cedar wood and his fan, making the sort of high whining noises that Indians make when they are playing at being Indians. Eventually, either the cedar wood stopped burning or Jimmie Durham got tired, for he stopped waving his arms around and began to speak. Against a backdrop of seemingly unrelated slides, he told us a little about himself. He told us what it had been like moving out to "the plain country" for the first time as a young man having grown up "in the forest." He told us what it had been like seeing the Missouri River for the first time. There had been baby ducks on it. He couldn't tell us how moved he'd been by the sight of baby ducks on the Missouri River. He'd gone straight to the nearest phone and called his family to tell them about those baby ducks. "Well," Jimmie Durham went on with the air of a man who has finally come to the point, "now Reagan has sold all the water in the Missouri River."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I waited, hoping to hear more, but nothing more ever came. The artist made no effort to amplify the statement or develop the thought, to suggest in what *sense* Reagan had sold the water in the Missouri River, for what and to whom. He made no attempt to show how this extraordinary symptom of the State of the Union had come about, how it related to the baby ducks or to the plight of the Indians, for that matter. There was no explanation, no exposition; only the words repeated over and over. And each time he said it—"Reagan has sold all the water in the Missouri River!"—one or two members of the audience made little "Hunh!" noises, as if to say, "How do you like that! Just the sort of thing you'd expect from a guy like Reagan!"

After a while the artist began passing things out to the audience. Some of them were exotic-looking Indian objects made of feathers and bones. Some looked like souvenirs. Some were simply pieces of paper or postcards with drawings on them. (Kerry and I each got a postcard, but we couldn't make them out in the darkness and unfortunately we dropped them somewhere along the way.) At one point a huge shank bone painted red and blue came by us.

Meanwhile, the slide projector was flashing images on the wall behind. Like the statement about the Missouri River, the slides went completely unremarked and unexplained. Occasionally the artist uttered sentences in which phrases like, "strip-mining," "coal-mining," and "uranium-mining" occurred. And sometimes the slides depicted photographs of men working pumps or a turbine of some sort. Once a photograph of a glass-and-chrome skyscraper flashed up with a sign outside the building saying "Manufacturers Hanover Trust." A number of people uttered little grunts of indignation because it was a bank. Another time the slide depicted a road sign—"Site of the Massacre at Wounded Knee 2 miles—and everyone sighed.

The Jimmie Durham Show was drawing to a close. "I have two things left to give away," the artist announced in a tone of deep sadness. "This genuine Indian leather bracelet . . . ." He unstrapped the bracelet from his wrist and waved it about in the air. A number of hands reached out to claim the gift and the woman in front of me said to her friend, "If I'd known *that* was going I would have waited!" And now the artist had only one thing left to give away, he said. "This genuine Indian shirt." He unfastened the first two buttons and took the shirt off over his head; he held it out to the audience. "It's a Medium, I think," he said checking the label.

Well, I thought, nobody's going to want a sweaty old shirt; and besides, it *looks* so bad—literally taking the shirt off of someone else's back! But this seemed not to have occurred to the members of this socially conscious forum, or at any rate not to trouble them. From all over the audience grasping hands reached out to claim the shirt; and when, bare-chested, Jimmie Durham sat back down against the wall and began playing an enormous shell with a comb, singing to himself in the high, whining fashion in which Indians sing to themselves when they have just given a lot of people presents, the audience chattered and whispered excitedly, playing show-and-tell with their spoils.

The next artist was Tannis Hugill performing a work entitled "Hanging Woman" which (I saw from my press release) was one of "two short pieces dealing with womanhood and sexuality." A blond woman entered wearing a strapless pink Princess Gown made of organza and netting. She clutched a large flashing light to her bosom and was humming to herself. At center stage she lay down on the floor and, leaving the flashing light behind her, made her way out of the room crawling backward on her belly. A moment later she reappeared wearing a rubber monster-mask over her head and walked back out to center stage reciting a little poem. It was full of lines like, "I am a woman . . . alone I have nightmares . . . I am a woman . . . I am a monster . . . I am a woman . . . I have a body that wants and a mouth that needs . . ." and I'm afraid that's just about all I took down because I'd heard

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this one so many times before. I guess these short pieces dealing with womanhood and sexuality never change.

The middle-aged woman two rows behind me was puzzled by "Hanging Woman." She had several chins, a blond wig, and wore a quantity of make-up under which the weight of her whole face seemed to droop and bow. I'd noticed her because she was the only member of the audience who'd actually looked bored *before* the show began. She'd obviously been strong-armed into coming by her two very eager-looking friends. But once there, she was actually *trying* to understand what all this was about.

As Tannis Hugill went off-stage I heard her say to her friend (who, for all her studied enthusiasm, looked no less out-of-place): "Tell me, why was she wearing that mask?"

"You can't ask things like that," her friend answered impatiently. These people are trying to *say* something! You can't just sit around asking questions like 'Why?'"

"But I don't understand." The first woman sounded ready to cry with vexation. "Why a mask?"

And so the second woman, cornered, had to think for a second. "Well, I don't know," she said a fraction more kindly. "I suppose it's because women *do* wear masks . . ."

Got it in one, I thought! And that was really all there was to it, wasn't it? Tannis Hugill was going to have to get up a damn sight earlier in the morning than that if she was going to get anything past these two!

The next work, entitled "Clearinghouse" by Charles Dennis, was designated "an excerpt" in the program. The press release provided a brief description: "'The Survivor' travels through a New York City of the not-so-distant future." Accordingly, the extract from the artist's film featured Bob Brandt and Lissie Willoughby dressed up in gas masks and white boiler suits walking around New York. They wandered past garbage dumps carrying briefcases, read copies of newspapers that underwent spontaneous combustion, and boarded buses. About halfway through the film a figure dressed exactly like Bob Brandt and Lissie Willoughby entered the performance area. It walked about the stage and did a little dance with leaps and prances. Once or twice the figure stood between the wall and the projector so that the film-image appeared clearly on his torso: the image of one white-boiler-suited figure cast on another. The audience took this fairly calmly and the film ended with the boiler-suited figure moving toward us in freeze-frame.

This image stayed on the wall while the live performer made his exit. There was a grinding noise for perhaps thirty seconds and another figure entered: a man, naked except for a loincloth and covered from head to foot in mud. The man performed a writhing interpretive dance that involved a good deal of wriggling about on the floor, climbing up on a desk, and taking up a number of more or less unattractive attitudes. He lay on his back on the desk and kicked up his legs like a baby. He stood up on the desk, squatted down, fell off, and climbed back up. Then he writhed a little more, rolled off the desk, did a spider walk across the room, and finally crawled, on his back and in reverse, out the open door, closing it behind him with his feet.

When the lights came up again everyone seemed quite pleased to be able to move and stretch. Irving Wexler stood and announced that there would be a ten- or fifteen-minute intermission. He looked at the floor of the performance area where the last performance piece had left great swatches of slippery, sludgy mud and in a tone of mild, ineffectual distress said vaguely to the company assembled, "Is there any way of getting this . . ." He trailed off, smiling and waving his hand helplessly toward the mess on the floor. A number of voices from the audience called out dismissively, "Walk around it! Walk around it!" The old man brightened, nodding. "Walk around it," he advised the people who were already doing just that.

Kerry wanted to find a ladies' room and I thought I'd take a look at the journalism professor's leaflets upstairs. Outside the performance area the mud-man, looking a little

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cleaner, was gathering his things together in preparation for an imminent departure. This was one socially concerned artist who, having done his bit, clearly had every intention of beating it. "What kind of mud *was* that?" a fellow from the audience was asking as I went past. The artist wiped his face. "Oh, it was just ordinary clay," he said. "Really? That's *incredible*!" the other man exclaimed. The artist nodded. "Just ordinary potting clay," he repeated and gave a modest little shrug as though to say, "Hell, it was nothing!"

Upstairs, the Indian was chatting with some fellow artists. Smoking a cigarette he looked shockingly sybaritic. I walked over to the press table and began poring over the literature. Most of it I had already seen, but for five dollars, I noticed, you could buy a poster commemorating *State of Mind/State of the Union*. It was a rather good poster: "The underside of culture," it said over and over in varying bright matte shades, "is blood, torture, death and horror. The underside of culture is blood, torture, death and horror . . . ." It had bright daubs of color in the foreground suggesting the image of a human brain.

Kerry came back with the information that she couldn't find a bathroom anywhere, explaining that performers were dressing in the only one she could find and she didn't like to push her way in. "That's ridiculous!" I said. "There must be a toilet somewhere. Surely even in the avant-garde . . ." She went off to ask again. On my way back down I passed the Indian on the stairs, deep in conversation with a skinny fellow wearing an earring.

"Just that whole aspect of *giving*," the man was saying, "I mean—I'll never forget it!"

Downstairs, the performance area didn't seem quite so crowded anymore. About a third of the audience seemed to have found something else to do on a Sunday evening. Kerry, joining me again (she had eventually invaded the ladies' room), voiced her suspicion that the others had gone home to watch *The Jewel in the Crown* on televison.

The first number in the second half was another "excerpt"—or two excerpts, rather, from a piece called "Dungeons and Basements" by Ellen Fisher. First was a work of computer graphics consisting of robot-like figures (either human-shaped computers or computer-shaped humans—it wasn't clear) changing shape and color against different colored backgrounds. This part was called "Broken Man's Future" but I couldn't really say why. Then came "Healing the Broken Man (live performance)" in which a woman, wearing a sheath-like dress rather like a bath-towl (though fortunately more cohesive) and a stocking over her head, did a little dance with a jumping-jack doll. She crawled around on the floor to a dissonant flute duet; she played with the doll, sometimes making it crawl along beside her, sometimes standing it up against her. Finally, she walked across the stage to where a blue spot hung aimed at a small coffin-like box. I lost sight of her then, because the tall people in front of me kept changing position, but I imagine that she ended by putting the doll in the box.

Next came another of Tannis Hugill's short pieces dealing with womanhood and sexuality. In "Pink Pig," Tannis Hugill appeared wearing pasties and a pink tutu, and stood on a chair singing "La Vie en rose." Her whole body was covered with some sort of pink powder. She sang "La Vie en rose" and another song I didn't recognize. She couldn't actually sing, but that didn't matter much because the main point of the number was the six-foot-long phallus protruding from underneath her tutu like an elephant's trunk.

The audience found this number very entertaining. They gasped and giggled eagerly when the artist executed a number of inaccurate bumps and grinds, waving her penis about in the air and trying to shake her pasties. They especially liked it when she twined the lusty member about her neck, and when after kissing and stroking it a number of times she released a flowing bundle of silver tinsel from the tip of her member, there was a little spasm of applause. I looked over at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Irving Wexler. He had his arm draped around the woman sitting next to him; they were smiling warmly at each other.

The last item on the program was "a comedy" to be performed by one Danitra Vance, entitled "Every Woman and Some Men." I felt a little sorry for Danitra Vance since "Pink Pig," I imagined, would prove to be a hard act to follow. A young black woman came into the room trailing another woman and two men behind her. "Hi," she said, "I'm Danitra Vance and these are The Mellow White Boys." There was a stunned silence. Danitra Vance half turned away from the audience and stared at us on the diagonal. "Is somethin' wrong with you all?" she asked, not as though she really cared, but as though she wasn't sure, suddenly, that she wanted to be in this particular arena. "I just introduced myself," she said, shaking her head in disbelief. "Hello? Is there anyone out there?" The audience began to laugh and some of them called back "Hello!" I looked around. People were looking alert and interested. For my own part, I felt a little flushed with the exertion of having had a direct and cogent remark addressed to me. And, strangely, the whole atmosphere of the room had changed: someone with talent had just walked into the room.

It was indeed strange, the difference between this bright, perky kid and the seeming hordes of mindless *artistes* that had gone before her. It was partly that this girl was a professional; she had a skill and an act to perform. She wanted to have a particular effect on the audience and she knew how to achieve it. What was buzzing through the room like an electric current, making its way through the surface of the deadly somnolent state that had come over us all, was the realization on some level that until that moment there had been not a trace of intelligence, wit, imagination, or original vision in the room all evening.

None of the previous "works" (with the possible exception of the Indian and the bepenised chanteuse—which had to be seen to be believed) had actually required any performance. By simply reading their descriptions in the program you could guess exactly what they would consist of, which made the experience of sitting through them almost redundant. But you had to *hear* Danitra Vance deliver the title of her act in order to understand it. "I consider myself every woman and some men," she said defiantly, laying claim to a universality that incorporated an idea that was, however slight, at least an idea. She introduced herself as "an avant-garde artist who works at Bloomingdale's." (There was some strangled laughter at this.) She had a show at La Mama the following week, she said, and she hoped we'd all come to see it.

The first routine she did involved impersonating a famous female gynecologist who had written a best-selling self-help book called, "Between Your Legs and You." I didn't write down the details of her performance because I was leaning on Kerry and weeping with laughter. The second number was a send-up of avant-garde artists. She put her jacket on backwards and introduced herself as Aquanetta Feinstein, from Chicago. Back in Chicago, she said, she'd always been "in the retarded class," but later in life she'd moved to New York and become an avant-garde rap artist. She said she was studying at "Some Little Academy of Music." "All my art is about myself," she said, "'cause I think art should be autobiographical." And she'd just finished an avant-garde opera called "Aquanetta Feinstein on the Beach."

She did an excerpt from one of her "performance pieces." She stood on the chair on which Tannis Hugill and her penis had stood to sing "La Vie en rose" and recited some poetry while The Mellow White Boys stood with their faces pressed up against the wall and writhed and moaned.

> I hate a guy who wears sandals like what Jesus wore . . .
> ("Shoo-op, shoo-op," went The Mellow White Boys)
> He is a wretch. ("Shoo-op, shoo-op,")
> I am a wretch. ("Shoo-op, shoo-op,")
> We are all wretches.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She got off the chair and began pacing about the stage. "I am *some*body," she declaimed. "I am somebody *else* . . . You are vegetables . . . I am a vegetable . . . We are all of us spinach and brussel sprouts on crutches . . .." At one point I looked over at Irving Wexler. He wasn't smiling and the woman next to him was looking at him a little anxiously.

We laughed not because Danitra Vance was sending up the *idea* of what we had seen. We laughed because her parody was so uncannily accurate.

I meant to go and hear her again the following week. But something came up and somehow I never made it to La Mama. So I'll go to my grave not knowing whether Danitra Vance was really as funny as we thought she was or whether she'd simply provided the closest thing to art we'd seen that night on Franklin Street. Kerry thought it might just have been literal comic relief; but every once in a while I'd remember the worried expression on the face of the woman sitting next to Irving Wexler and wonder.

The audience was still laughing when we all trooped up the stairs to the gallery. On our way past the works of S. K. Duff, Kerry nudged me. I looked over to where she was pointing: it was the painting entitled "I HAVE SEEN THINGS THAT I CANNOT BEGIN TO DESCRIBE."

"Gee, pal," I said, "you're not the only one!"

I did buy one of the posters, though.

Forthcoming in *The New Criterion:*

Kandinsky in Paris *by Hilton Kramer*
Heidegger at Freiburg, 1933 *by Roger Kimball*
The representational impulse: painting in New York 1960-1985 *by Jed Perl*
Aida from the Met *by Samuel Lipman*
New poems *by Alan Shapiro, Elizabeth Spires, and Herbert Morris*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hudson review

The Hudson Review

announces for publication, Spring 1985

Letters by WELDON KEES

edited by Robert E. Knoll

The poet and fiction writer, Weldon Kees, was at the center of the New York literary world in the 1940s. His never-before-published and witty letters describe Edmund Wilson and Mary McCarthy at home . . . a visit with Elizabeth Bishop to see Ezra Pound at St. Elizabeth's Hospital . . . candid glimpses of W. H. Auden, Marianne Moore, Truman Capote, Conrad Aiken and James Agee . . . a visit to the home of William Carlos Williams . . . the doings inside TIME magazine . . . the split-second make up of wartime news-reels . . .

Please send $5.00 to: The Hudson Review, 684 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10021. Subscriptions are: one year, $16; two years, $30; three years, $44.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Letters

Hawthorne's secret

To the Editors:

It is doubtful that anyone wants me to dispute the points, such as they are, of Tuttleton's long-winded and ill-natured assault on my *Hawthorne's Secret*. But I will object to his failure to mention the fact that, though the evidence—fictional and biographical—that Hawthorne knew the court records containing his ancestral secret is obviously circumstantial, it is abundant. I also note that the reviewer never gives a clue as to what he means by "the cavalier way" in which I treat the author's life. Then, misrepresenting my argument, he charges "rhetorical duplicity."

Last he has me claiming that Hawthorne's relationship with his sister Ebe was "a displacement of his longing for his mother." This states what I do not believe and did not say—and makes me a psychoanalytic critic to boot. That established, Tuttleton announces that I am "oblivious" to Frederick Crews's "rejection of the possibility of the psychoanalysis of dead authors . . . ." Well, whatever he tells himself and his readers, the facts are that I support Mr. Crews on psychoanalysis and literature. Further that Crews read my book last summer "with great interest," and wrote my editor Bill Goodman (August 10, 1984) with approval. I quote Mr. Crews with permission and thanks.

> If Young is right, the sexual preoccupation that some of us have found in Hawthorne's fiction can be more concretely explained than we had thought. The case is circumstantial but never forced, and I for one find it entirely plausible. But right or wrong, Young knows how to make his tale engaging. *Hawthorne's Secret* will give pleasure even to those who resist its argument.

Philip Young
Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania

James Tuttleton replies:

If my review of Professor Young's study of Hawthorne was "ill-natured," let me atone here by remarking that the book gave me pleasure too, though it was the pleasure of contesting an argument I regard as insufficiently grounded on verifiable biographical evidence. And if Young is not a psychoanalytic critic in this study, let me also apologize for suggesting it, although his Oedipal palaver and method of ignoring the manifest of the texts in search of latent incest material might have misled a better man than I.

All arguments based on mere circumstantial evidence are likely to have some degree of plausibility. This is especially true of arguments grounded on Freudian presuppositions, which will almost invariably structure the evidence in advance. My point was simply this: if you account for Hawthorne's life and work by positing an incestuous relationship with his sister Ebe, let us have the indisputable proof, the smoking pistol, as it were. That proof is lacking in this study; and the exiguous circumstantial evidence, which occupies only a part of this slender book, does not clinch the case. Crews recognized as much in his conditional clause: "If Young is right . . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Perhaps the evidence for Hawthorne's incest with his sister will turn up in a Massachusetts attic. But for the present, to say that he committed the act and that he wrote about it to get rid of it, without producing verifiable evidence, is to treat Hawthorne in a cavalier way. I think Young has some reservations about his own argument, some ambivalence about his claim for the incestuous "secret." How otherwise can one explain Young's remark, in describing Hawthorne's death: ". . . on May nineteenth Hawthorne learned from his friend [Oliver Wendell Holmes] that Thackeray had died the previous winter in his sleep. He remarked what a boon it would be to go without a struggle, and that night he went—taking with him, if he had one, his secret" (p. 47). Here the conditional clause is Young's.

John Hawkes's fan club

To the Editors:

Having written a critical introduction to the fiction of John Hawkes, I was interested to discover that I am a member of a "club" of Hawkes's supporters whose main intention in life is to inflate the fraudulent reputation of this contemporary American novelist. At least that appears to be the opinion of your reviewer, Bruce Bawer, in his shredding of a new Hawkes anthology (*Humours of Blood and Skin*; *New Criterion,* December, 1984)—a man who seems to conceive of his task as not discussing the work under review, but as attacking those who might perceive its merits. Of course, the real attack is on John Hawkes, not his critics, but Mr. Bawer seems to prefer the back door to the front, so that he spends a good deal of time and inches ripping critical statements out of context in hopes of proving that there is some kind of conspiracy amongst "us" to promote John Hawkes. But then again, Mr. Bawer apparently specializes in the practice of annihilating context so that he can indulge in his own brand of self-puffery, which smacks of the adolescent schoolboy who lies in wait all semester so that he can catch the teacher out one time. I doubt if any writer, major or minor, could stand up to Mr. Bawer's idiotic test of snippeting, wherein a few phrases are "gleaned" (in Hawkes's case) from nine novels in order to "prove" what an insipid writer he is. Such practices point to the insipidity of the critic, not the writer, though I'm hardly astounded to see that such practices are allowed in the pages of *The New Criterion,* which is rapidly gaining a reputation amongst people of all sensibilities as an outlet for cranks of Mr. Bawer's ilk. My point here is not to defend Hawkes, who does not need defending, but to protest against Mr. Bawer's ignorance and deceitfulness in his review of Hawkes's work.

Example: Mr. Bawer claims that *Passions of Blood and Skin* is Hawkes's "thirteenth straight" book from New Directions. While this is technically true, it is misinformed and misinforming. *The Passion Artist* and *Virginie: Her Two Lives,* Hawkes's last two novels, appeared under the imprint of Harper & Row for mass market; a limited edition of each was published simultaneously by New Directions. What is objectional here is Mr. Bawer's implication: that Hawkes's work could only be published under the buddy system established between himself, Albert Guerard, and James Laughlin (and then promoted by members of the "club"). Clearly, Mr. Bawer doesn't know very much about New Directions or any of the parties involved to make such an assumption: I doubt if even your readers are willing to swallow the imputation against, probably, the most enlightened American publisher in the twentieth century in Mr. Bawer's suggestion that Laughlin published Hawkes in the first place because his "pal," Albert Guerard, convinced him to do so. Laughlin published Hawkes because he recognized him as an important young writer—a recognition that, in the opinion of a great deal many more readers than is suggested by Mr. Bawer's conception of "the Hawkes club," continues to prove itself.

Example: Mr. Bawer harps on the business of Hawkes's reputation (as if that was what he was supposed to review, rather than the book at hand), suggesting that, somehow, a coterie of critics (mostly stuffy English professor types) have intuitively and magically orchestrated themselves into a single voice whose purpose is to sing Hawkes's praises and lament his lack of sales. This is only true insofar as any writer attracts his critics, i.e., people who are willing to expend time, effort, and intelligence to comprehend the work of an artist whose importance they are at

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

odds to define and explain. Other than that, Mr. Bawer's conception of a "Hawkes club" is sheer paranoia, though why he should be paranoid about the reputation of a writer he so thoroughly disdains is a matter for analysis beyond my powers. Of course, Mr. Bawer is concerned to reveal Hawkes's immorality, and his own morality; to draw the contrast between Hawkes's artistic fraudulency, and his own critical candor; to convince us of Hawkes's stylistic excesses, and to confront us with his own analytical acuity. Indeed, Mr. Bawer needs no "club" to defend him, since he is largely engaged, for the purposes of this review, in becoming one unto himself. But do such flagrant and dishonest attempts to justify one's own existence by attempting to trash the work of an important writer belong in the pages of a national review? Do such obvious misconstruals and deliberate misreadings of an author's work deserve your space and our attention? Is it paranoia and bitterness you wish to convey, or is it possible that you have not been able to penetrate the very thin veneer of Mr. Bawer's moralistic rhetoric which covers the self-aggrandizement lying beneath? Such questions would be beneath consideration, were it not that some of your readers might be mislead into the purchase of Mr. Bawer's "vision" of John Hawkes. Whatever his faults, Hawkes is for many reasons worthy of our observance, and his work does not deserve to be subjected to the nearly unadulterated stupidity Mr. Bawer exhibits in his review. It is necessary to understand what "character" is in fiction before one can begin to comprehend what the rejection of character might mean; it is necessary to understand what "style" is in order to judge its semantics and its efficacy; it is necessary to understand the purposes of repetition and the function of images in fiction in order to charge a work with monotony. I could go on, but I hope it is clear that Mr. Bawer understands none of these things, though he feels perfectly free to comment on all of them in the case of a particular writer. That the writer he chooses authors works of such merit and complexity as to be thoroughly beyond Mr. Bawer's ken is, also, perfectly clear; what is not clear is why he wants to waste his time writing about what he both dislikes and is not capable of appreciating, or why you want to waste our time by publishing such an elaborate example of critical ineptness and meanness of spirit.

Patrick O'Donnell
University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona

Bruce Bawer replies:

I'd like to thank Mr. O'Donnell for providing the readers of *The New Criterion* with a perfect example of the type of "criticism" that I described in my piece on Hawkes and his critics (which appeared, by the way, in the November, not the December, issue). As I pointed out in that piece, it is something of a time-honored tradition among true-blue, knee-jerk Hawkesians to break into name-calling whenever a freethinking critic dares to examine the work of John Hawkes and find it wanting. O'Donnell is, as it happens, a very junior member of the Hawkes fan club—his Twayne-series study of Hawkes appeared two years ago, and is apparently his only significant publication—but he has obviously learned how to play the fan-club game, and not by halves either: his letter is probably the longest unbroken stretch of name-calling that I have ever seen. He accuses me of "sheer paranoia," "unadulterated stupidity," "ignorance," "deceitfulness," and just about everything else but grand theft, yet manages all the while (his flaunting of the word *example* notwithstanding) to avoid supporting these accusations; in fact, he appears to reject the very notion of substantiation, one of the charges he hurls at me being that I have the nerve to bolster my arguments by quoting illustrative passages from Hawkes, a process he refers to as "idiotic . . . snippeting." The plain truth is that, if O'Donnell had done any "snippeting" from my piece, he would have proven to the reader that there is no substance to his complaints. But—and it is hardly necessary for me to say this—he is not really interested in substance. His letter fails completely to address the issue I raised in my piece: the literary merit of John Hawkes's fiction.

He ignores this issue, of course, because to him, and to the rest of the fan club—as his own words make clear—Hawkes's literary merit is beyond question. Hawkes "does not need defending"; his "importance" (as O'Donnell puts it) is taken for granted. The hapless critic who fool-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ishly fails to join in the hosannas is not, by the fan club's lights, exercising independence of thought but is, rather, defacing a public monument with his mean-spirited "misconstruals" *(sic)*. One would think that a primary purpose of Hawkes criticism would be to decide exactly how "important" Hawkes really is, but one would be dead wrong: for it is this very process of objective, uninhibited critical inquiry that the fan club—to which the ideal critic, apparently, is little more than a tenured press agent (or, as O'Donnell's metaphor suggests, an obedient schoolboy to Hawkes's teacher)—is at pains to suppress.

And *suppress* is precisely the right word. Given the history of the fan club's treatment of dissident critics, I knew when I sat down to write about *Humors of Blood and Skin* (the title of which this sworn enemy of "misinformation" succeeds in getting wrong not once but twice) that I could probably expect a rejoinder on the order of what O'Donnell has provided. What O'Donnell would naturally prefer not to see discussed in print is that it is manifestly the vocal zealotry of a few, and not the admiration of the many, that has sustained Hawkes's reputation through an endless series of numbingly unimaginative novels. And why is this handful of zealous academic fans so devoted? O'Donnell himself tells us why in his Twayne study: novels offer "an embarrassment of interpretative riches" to the critic. They're so ambiguous, that is, that you can make anything you wish out of them. Just like Play-Doh!

This is why I took the firm stand I did in my piece: I was, and am, tired of seeing the reputation of one mediocre writer after another inflated artificially because some symbol-hunting, tenure-obsessed "scholars," having no real love or feeling for literature, choose to spend their careers insisting to the world that the literary territories they have staked out are not barren plots of tundra but stretches of Amazonian jungle, full of mystery and beauty and inexhaustible natural wealth. Hawkes, thanks to the "interpretive riches" of his work, has few competitors when it comes to attracting this kind of attention. Whether reviewing for *The New Criterion* or for other journals, I consider it part of my purpose—and, I should think, it is the responsibility of every critic—to attempt to straighten out some of the twisted views that have gained currency as a result of such reprehensible methods.

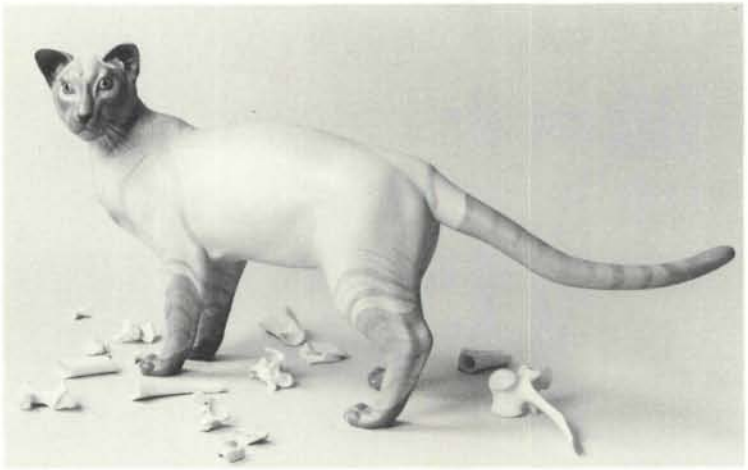
Speaking of twisted views, there's one that I'd like to straighten out right now. O'Donnell chooses, in his letter, to construe some remarks of mine as constituting an attack upon James Laughlin, whom he thereupon proceeds to defend with heart-stirring eloquence. In connection with this, let me say that I am second to none in my gratitude to Mr. Laughlin, one of the great figures of modern American publishing, for shepherding into print the works of such writers as William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound. But Hawkes, not Laughlin, was the subject of my piece, and the plain fact is that I consider Laughlin's devotion to the works of John Hawkes—to the extent of publishing thirteen bad books by him, and one absolutely ridiculous one *about* him—to be terribly misplaced. O'Donnell professes shock at the notion that Laughlin's decision to publish Hawkes could have been influenced by the enthusiasm of Laughlin's friend, Albert J. Guerard, for Hawkes's work; but my remarks on this score merely reflect the commonsensical awareness that Laughlin can hardly be much different from anyone else in publishing, in which, as in any other business, such recommendations have been known to make all the difference. (The most notable recent demonstration of this principle is the case of William Kennedy, who needed a testimonial from Saul Bellow, no less, to secure publication of *Ironweed*.) O'Donnell, in treating this sensible view as a veritable act of sacrilege, is simply being disingenuous.

One more thing: O'Donnell refers to me and to unnamed other *New Criterion* writers as "cranks." Judging by what I read in *The New Criterion, crank* is, in O'Donnell's lexicon, a word used to describe a critic who has (1) a low threshold of tolerance for pseudo-literary flummery; (2) a sense of allegiance to no writer, but only to a good solid set of aesthetic criteria; and (3) a tendency to be irritated by "critics" who act like publicists. I plead guilty.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LIZBETH STEWART

REPRESENTED BY THE HELEN DRUTT GALLERY



"THE PREDATOR", 1984
PORCELAIN GLAZE, PAINT;
HAND-BUILT
23" x 44" x 15"

HELEN DRUTT GALLERY
1721 WALNUT STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103
(215) 735-1625

MAURICE ENGLISH POETRY AWARD

JUROR: 1985 AWARD

GALWAY KINNELL

This award will be presented annually to an author in his or her sixth (or beyond) decade of life for a distinguished book of poems published during the preceding calendar year. It responds to the fact that a body of work by Maurice English did not appear in book form until his 55th year. The Maurice English Poetry Award carries an honorarium of $1,000 and a request for a public reading in Philadelphia. It is given in tribute to his work by his family.

Books should be forwarded by March 1, 1985 to:

HELEN WILLIAMS ENGLISH
HELEN DRUTT GALLERY
1721 WALNUT STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19103

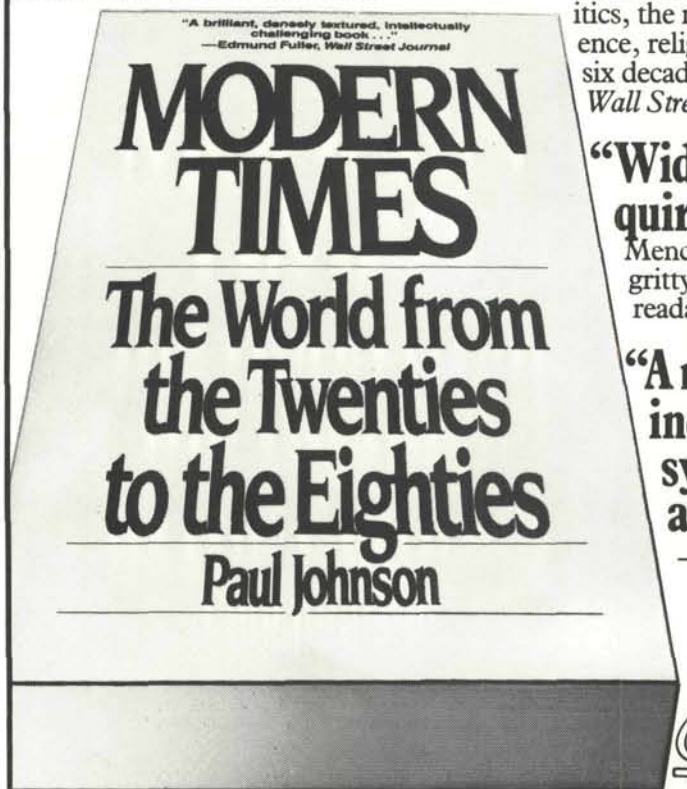
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NOW IN PAPERBACK

Named one of the best books of 1983 by the *New York Times Book Review*

The "brilliant, densely textured, intellectually challenging book"* that sums up the major events and movements of the past six decades.

"Truly a distinguished work of history... MODERN TIMES unites historical and critical consciousness."—Robert Nisbet, *New York Times Book Review*


"A brilliant, densely textured, intellectually challenging book . . ."
—Edmund Fuller, Wall Street Journal
MODERN TIMES
The World from the Twenties to the Eighties
Paul Johnson

"Frequently surprises, even startles, us with new views of past events and fresh looks at the characters of the chief world movers and shakers, in politics, the military, economics, science, religion, and philosophy of six decades."—*Edmund Fuller, *Wall Street Journal*

"Wide-ranging and quirky, ... A latter-day Mencken, Johnson is witty, gritty and compulsively readable."—*Foreign Affairs*

"A marvelously incisive and synthesizing account."
—*Commentary*

832 pages, $9.95

Colophon Books
Harper & Row

1817

At bookstores or call TOLL FREE (800) 638-3030

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tree Motif, 1953. Oil on canvas, 48 x 38 inches.

JOHN FERREN

Paintings 1950s-1960s

March 23–April 13

AM SACHS

980 Madison Ave (76 St)
New York, NY 10021
Telephone (212) 734-7795

MARCH 2–30

NORMAN TOYNTON

DANIEL NEWBURG
44 WHITE ST. NEW YORK
THURS. FRI. SAT. 1–6
AND BY APPOINTMENT 219-1885

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DRAWINGS BY SCULPTORS

Carl Andre / Walter de Maria
Dan Flavin / Donald Judd / Sol LeWitt
Fred Sandback / Richard Tuttle

March 5-March 30, 1985

Troels Wörsel

Recent Paintings and Watercolors

March 7-March 30, 1985

Brooke Alexander, Inc.
20 West 57th Street New York City, New York 10019 212/757-3721

March

Stanley William Hayter

Innovative Intaglio Prints
The 1940's & 50's

New Drawings

Dean Dass, Carroll Dunham, Donald Forsythe
Anthony Gorny, Paul Harcharik, Nona Hershey
Edward O'Brien, Nancy Randall
Steven Sorman, Janet Stayton

Dolan/Maxwell Gallery

1701 Walnut Street Philadelphia 215 665·1701

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

illuminating

Minds, Brains and Science

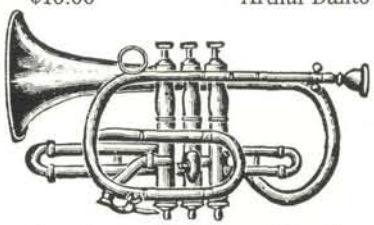
John Searle

How can we reconcile a picture of ourselves as conscious, free, and rational beings while science tells us that the universe consists of mindless physical particles?

In his characteristically down-to-earth style, Searle offers a philosophy that helps dispel the apparent incongruities between common sense and science.

"This book is aggressive, zealous, and acute. Searle's manner is that of a plain man in possession of plain truths that no one can reject...I can't think of another book quite like it."

$10.00 –Arthur Danto



Contemplating Music

Challenges to Musicology

Joseph Kerman

This is a book for all serious music lovers, one that establishes the place of music study firmly in the mainstream of modern intellectual history. Kerman expands the concept of musicology beyond its traditional concern to include discussions of music theory and analysis, ethnomusicology, and music criticism.

In the process, he provides the first, full-scale account of the ideas and ideologies that have transformed music over the last forty years.

$15.00

Using Biography

William Empson

Distinguished critic William Empson shows the ways in which an understanding of biographical material can deepen the reader's appreciation of a writer's methods and intentions.

This book, typical of his witty, iconoclastic style, explores the works of writers as diverse as Marvell, Dryden, Fielding, Yeats, Eliot, and Joyce.

"I rate him as the chief English literary critic of the century ...[His] is almost certainly the finest study of Fielding ever written. The essay on Joyce is a great work. There is nothing to touch it."

$17.50 –Frank Kermode

Mikhail Bakhtin

Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist

In just a few decades, Russian literary critic and historian Mikhail Bakhtin has evolved from a virtual unknown to one of the major interdisciplinary thinkers of our century.

Clark and Holquist have written the only full-scale biography of this fascinating man, and the first work to treat the full range of his intellectual activity in such varied fields as literary theory, psychology, and Marxist thought.

"Clark and Holquist have transformed our understanding of Bakhtin."

–Stephen J. Greenblatt

$25.00

Belknap

Definitive reading.

At bookstores or from Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 02138

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOSHUA JOHNSON

Portrait of John Jacob Anderson and his Sons, Edward and William, c. 1817, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 inches

WASHBURN

Washburn Gallery 42 East 57th Street, New York, N.Y. 10022 (212) 753-0546
Fine Art Consultants and Appraisers

The New Criterion
850 Seventh Avenue
Suite 503
New York NY 10019

Second Class Postage
Paid at New York, NY
and at additional
Mailing Offices

DGOLDZP15CL27ZA 08/31/86
PHILIP GOULD
15 CLAREMONT AVE
NEW YORK, NY 10027

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED